re Series

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

K K Pillay

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

K.K. Pillay, M.A., D. Litt., D. Phil (Oxon.)
Director, Institute of Traditional Cultures of South and South-East Asia
Former Professor of Indian History, University of Madras

MJP PUBLISHERS
Chennai 600 005

First Published : 1979
MJP re-series first reprint : 2007

ISBN 81-8094-040-3
© Publishers, 2007
All rights reserved
Printed and bound in India

MJP PUBLISHERS
47, Nallathambi Street
Triplicane
Chennai 600 005

MJP 031

To

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

India has a rich heritage of tradition and culture which dates back to the beginning of human existence. But unfortunately, most information of the past has not been properly documented. The few books published in the past are not within the reach of the needy, and in the present e-age with its modern communication techniques, many may not find time to preserve our heritage. But a few academicians and historians who may come forward in the future for research studies may lack the needed resources.

Keeping this in mind, MJP Publishers has endeavoured to revive the oldest rare books to serve the academic community and the society at large. In this effort, a series of rare books would be republished under the banner, "MJP's re-series". These rare books have been carefully selected based on the significance and authenticity of their contents as we perceive.

The books in the "re-series" have been recomposed in an elegant style and format to suit the interest of the present-day readers. Only slight modifications have been made for better presentation, and care has been taken to keep this to a minimum and to not affect the contents of the original edition.

This book is an extract (Chapter XV) from the original edition *Studies in the History of India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu* written and published by K.K. Pillay in 1979.

We hope that the "re-series" books would prove to be of immense help to researchers and general readers to have a better understanding of many important facts and happenings of the past, thus exposing the richness of our culture, tradition and knowledge.

MJP Publishers

In remembrance . . .

A casteless society and human brotherhood is my ideal.

Dr. K.K. Pillay

Dr. K. Kanagasabapathy Pillay, as Dr. K.K. Pillay was known, was born as the eldest son of Kolappa Pillay and Parvathy, 3rd April, 1905 in an agricultural family in the small hamlet of Aloor of the Kalkulam Taluk of Kanyakumari district—the then Travancore State. His father Kolappa Pillay was a village school master proficient in both Tamil and Malayalam, and Dr. Pillay used to fondly recollect his father as "Thinnai Pallikooda Vathiyar." His sister Mrs. Ammu was married and settled in Kanyakumari district.

K.K. Pillay had his primary education in the village school and later joined the English High School at Kottar, Kanyakumari district. After schooling, he joined the Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, when Raw Eastaff and G.H. Marsdan were the Principals, as a student of History for his intermediate course with his optional subjects as Ancient History, Indian History and History of Great Britain.

He completed his Honours degree in history with distinction from Maharaja's Arts College at Trivandrum, when Prof.K.V. Rengaswamy Iyengar and Prof. C.V. Chandrasekaran were the Principals. He started his career as a lecturer at Government Arts College, Kumbakonam, in 1927 and subsequently became the Professor of History at the Presidency College, Madras. In 1946, he received the D. Litt. degree for his historical research publication titled *The Suchindrum Temple,*

for the compliation of which he was motivated and inspired by Kavimani Desikavinayagam Pillay to whom he dedicated the volume. Undoubtedly, the book is a distinct contribution to our knowledge of south Indian history. In 1948, he obtained his D. Phil. degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the Oxford University for his work "History of self governance in the Madras Presidency (AD 1882–1918)," under the guidance of Prof. C.H. Philips. Appointed in 1954 as Professor of Indian History in the University of Madras, he became in 1961 Professor of Area Studies in the same University. After retiring from the University, he took up the directorship of the Institute of Traditional Cultures of South and South-East Asia, succeeding Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri. Thus he has had the association with the handling of problems of history and culture for well over half a century.

Dr. K.K. Pillay was one of the pioneers to encourage research in historical studies. His historical research works have paved the way to unearth many historical facts. He reiterated that historians should possess the basic qualities of honesty, sincerity, judiciousness and impartiality, and that a narrow-minded, one-sided and emotional approach towards issues relating to caste, language and regional issues should be strictly avoided. He also had the strong notion that historians should not rely totally on data from stone inscriptions alone to put forth their research findings but should be well-informed about the fields of literature, anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy and politics, to present their research findings in an effective and unbiased manner.

Dr. Pillay has delivered presidential addresses at the Indian History Congress at Jubbalpore, 1970, and at the History Associations at the Madurai Kamaraj, Annamalai and Calicut Universities, the Presidency College, Pachaiyappa's College and the Christian College, Madras.

Besides several books in Tamil on the history and culture of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Pillay has several other publications which include

- *The Suchindrum Temple*
- *A Social History of the Tamils,* Vol. I
- *South India and Ceylon*

- *History of Local Self Government in the Madras Presidency 1850–1919.*
- *Studies on the History of India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu.*

Dr. Pillai was married to V. Saraswati Ammal from Theroor, Kanyakumari District. They had three daughters and one son, Mani.

The eldest daughter, Rajam, pursued her research on the Kanyakumari Temple. She was married to Yogeswaran, a Tamil Professor. Sabapathy, their son, is a lecturer at Venkateswara Engineering College, who married Ambika, and has a son named Aswin. Their daughter Rajeswari is married to Mariappan, an Engineer in AUDCO, and they have a son named Manikandan.

Dr. Pillay's second daughter Thangam was married to Perumal of Veerani, Kanyakumari District. They have a son Srinivas married to Kohila, and they have a daughter and a son.

His third daughter, Vimala, was married to Kanniperumal, an Engineer. They have two daughters—Ambujam who is a lecturer at Anna University and is married to Madhusoothana also a professor at Anna University, and Vanitha Vedam who is a sociologist, and married to Madhavan, working at Neyveli Lignite Corporation. The former have two daughters Manu Vaasanthi and Vimala Madhangi. The latter have two sons, Dinesh Damodar and Vimalesh Kannan.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1

2. Origin and Development of the Caste System in India 7

    Development of Caste 18

        Formation of New Castes 19

3. Rise and Growth of the Caste System in Tamil Nadu 23

    Kadavar 38

    Tattalikottuvar 39

    Uvaiccan 40

    Adigalmar 40

    Agambadiyar 42

    Idaiyar 42

    Ilavar 42

    Castes in the Chola and Later Pandya Periods 43

    Mixed Marriages 44

    Vellalas 45

    Chettis 48

        The Nattukkottai Chettis 48

        Beri Chettis 50

        Komatti Chettis 51

        Kudirai Chetty 52

    Kallar 53

Maravar 54
Kaikkolar 57
Nadar 58
Pallis 60
Chakkiliyar 61
Paraiyar 61
Ambattan 64
Kammalar 65

4. The Right Hand and Left Hand Castes 69
5. Caste Government 87
   Caste Councils 95
   Decline of the Authority of the Caste Councils 99
6. Modern Tendencies 101
7. The Depressed Classes 111
   Origin 113
8. Merits and Drawbacks of the Caste System 133
   Drawbacks 139
9. The Future of the Caste System 147

Endnotes *159*

Index *165*

1

INTRODUCTION

Caste is an emotionally loaded theme. Therefore, in handling the subject, care has to be taken to avoid wounding the sentiments of people of the different castes. That does not mean, however, that the plain truth as one sees it should be suppressed or camouflaged. Courage of conviction is an imperative necessity. I am sure that my ideas on the caste system in Tamil Nadu will not be pleasing either to the Brahmins, caste Hindu non-Brahmins or the Depressed Classes. But the apprehension does not deter me from speaking out the truth as I see it.

The word 'caste' comes from the Portuguese word 'casta' signifying breed, race or kind. The first use of the word 'caste' occurs in 1563 in the writing of Garcia de Orta. The word 'caste' used by the French who spoke of 'caste' meaning breed. It is not known whether the Portuguese or the French used it originally in this sense; the

probability is that the Portuguese were the first to coin the word.

The word 'jati' or caste used in India specifies a subdivision of the larger division, 'Varna.' Varna is believed to have been based on colour or race. In post-Vedic times in North India the four-fold division seems to have appeared.[1]

The Varna concept was supposed to be based on the colour of the skin of a race and as a corollary of that belief emerged the theory that Varnas arose as a result of conquest of one race by another. But colour could not have been the fool-proof index of a race. Could it be thought that the Dasas, who perhaps become the ancestors of the Sudras, were alone dark, while the Brahmin, Kshatrian and Vaisya gradually developing into the priests, warriors and common men, were all fair in complexion?

Over the ages, subsequent to the epoch of the Brahmanas there appeared the castes or subdivision of the Varnas. It is well known that while there were four Varnas there have been well over three thousand castes or jatis. A jati is partly occupational and partly a sociological sub-division within each Varna.

The traditional association between caste and occupation, however, is far from dissolution. Though some mutations were possible, the traditional basis held ground for the most part. In recent times the extension of endogamy among the subdivisions of castes has tended to reduce the rigour of the caste;

but it has influenced only a very small section of the Hindu population. It is notable that even a change of religion does not destroy the caste system; for among converts too, the older caste distinctions persist, perhaps in a milder form.

Europeans studying the Indian caste are sometimes tempted to identify it with class. But the two are different. Caste is based on birth, conferring social status, while class is primarily a question of economic status. In a class society, status is determined by vocation and consequent income. It has been rightly said that caste and class are two parallel and overlapping systems of status-grading in society. Sometimes the class and caste characteristics are parallel; at others they cut across each other.[2]

But though the Indian caste system has developed certain distinctive features, there have been more or less similar social divisions in other countries. Analogous institutions have flourished in certain other countries of the world. In ancient Egypt there had existed a social division in which different groups adopted special features resembling those of the Indian caste system. But there was one vital difference. Intermarriage among the various groups was not prohibited. Further, in Egypt, all castes and professions were held in the same esteem.[3] Moses, the celebrated law giver of the Jews, divided the people into groups resembling castes.

In respect of functional allotment to specific groups of people, the ordinances of the Theosodian Code of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD can be cited as providing a parallel instance to the Hindu system.[4] But the most striking parallel to the Hindu varnas may be found in the early social organization of Japan which recognized four categories of people, viz. (1) the court nobles who claimed descent from deities or emperors (2) the military class (3) the Heimin or common people who were divided into cultivators, artisans and traders and (4) a pariah class, engaged in despised occupations such as leather-work, which lived in separate villages and could neither intermarry nor eat with the higher classes.[5] In respect of the earlier social organization of Japan there were some striking similarities with the Indian caste system. Analogous to the Chandalas of India, there were the etá of Japan. But intermarriage was prohibited only with the lowest class; it was common among the rest; to that extent it was different from the usages of the Indian caste system. The hereditary caste system with the rigidly endogamous subgroups was the distinctive feature of the Indian pattern.[6]

In Burma, a social organization similar in some respects to the Indian caste system existed. In Burma, under the old rule of the Burmese monarchy, seven distinct classes of outcastes were recognized. The Burmese word for one of them is *sandala*, which resembles the Chandala of India. It may be noted

that there are certain cases in Africa in which taboos associated with occupations have operated to prevent not merely intermarriage but any sexual relationship at all between pastoral and cultivating groups. Thus some elements of the Indian custom have been prevalent among several people in the world.

2

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

The Indian caste system has been studied intensively by sociologists, anthropologists and historians, both Indian and European.[7] But it is by no means easy to assess its origin, its traditional features, its merits and drawbacks. Indian writers have frequently yielded to the temptation of assigning it a religion-oriented background, while certain European savants have viewed it with some deep-seated prejudice. Many of the Western writers have failed to understand the inner meaning and significance of some Hindu social practices and traditional customs. Several Europeans approached the study of this hoary system with a prejudice that it is one of those social evils which the religious-minded Hindus had developed without proper reason.

Several theories have been advanced in explanation of the origin of the caste system. One

of the vague and general hypotheses is that caste is nothing but the outcome of the herd instinct coupled with a natural division of labour. But those features exist among all people, and therefore they do not afford a specific explanation of the origin of the caste system.

Some think that the Hindu caste system emerged out of totemism.[8] Caste is maintained by two prohibitions, one on interdining and the other on intermarriage. If one can trace the history and development of restriction in these two respects, both the origin and the development of caste will be revealed. These two inhibitions were found among certain early totemic groups.

For example, prohibition of interdining is found among some aborigines. An aboriginal tribe called *Kharias* in parts of Bihar and Orissa has a custom of the married daughter not being allowed to enter their own mother's kitchen. Its origin may be traced to the "Totem" taboo. The aborigines cherish and worship their respective totem. They are not allowed to eat with the people of their respective totem. But this taboo as well as that of intermarriage among certain tribes does not seem to be a convincing explanation of the complicated caste system.

Adoption of particular occupations was apparently the basis of caste. The Santals were originally casteless; but the list of sub-sects under different professions or callings shows the initial

stage formation in the casteless society of the Santals. Like the Santals, the Mundas, now found in certain parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, created Varna divisions on the basis of calling or profession. It is significant that in the original habitat of the Mundas the caste ramification is greater than elsewhere, if it is to be judged by the largest number of the depressed classes that are found there. It is suggested that the Mundas were the prime movers in creating the 'Varnas', and their Brahmin descendants were those who created and fanned the flame of caste differences.[9] But is it probable that the culturally advanced Aryans or Dravidians would have modelled their caste system on the practices of the aborigines like the Santals and Mundas? No.

An orthodox view held regarding the origin of the caste system is that which traces it to the so-called Purushasukta hymn. This hymn has been interpreted and explained by several thinkers, but its classical exposition is found in the great Manusmriti of Manu, the law-giver.[10] According to the Purushasukta hymn it is believed that the Brahmins arose from the mouth of the Purusha (Brahma), the Kshatriya from both his arms, the Vaisya from his thighs and the Sudra from his feet. Manu, however, in his interpretation, held that the Brahmin was born from the face of the Purusha. Manu associates caste with Brahma, while the Vishnu Purana holds the Purusha as identical with Vishnu.

On the basis of internal evidence Max Muller and several others hold that the Purushasukta hymn is an interpolation into the Vedic text.[11] It is not improbable that Manu himself was the author of this interpolation. However, Manu exploits the Purushasukta hymn to exalt the position of the higher castes. It is significant to remember that in the Vedic days the position of the Sudras was not much lower than that of the Brahmins. Gradually there was a growing deterioration of the position of the Sudras. It is said in the Rig Vedic period the Brahmins performed White Magic while the Sudras performed Black Magic. Gradually the Sudras declined to adopt the baptism of the sacred thread. From that began the deterioration of the Sudras. The Brahmins adopted exclusiveness towards the Sudras first and in due course to those of the other Varnas.

The European scholars generally held that the caste system was a product of the Aryan invasion, which led to the suppression of the Dasyus or the native population. But the fact of the Aryan invasion itself is now being questioned. Certain elements of similarity between the religion of the Persians and Aryans may well be explained from the Aryan ideas having travelled to Iran from India. Nor were the Dravidians identical with the Dasyus, the earlier inhabitants.

The Dasyus or Sudras themselves were not a despicable people in the Rig Vedic age. In fact, the evidence is that the Sudras occupied a respectable

position. The only difference between the Brahmins and the Sudras was a question of religious practice. If the Sudras were prepared to accept the Brahmana baptism with the Gayatri and the sacred thread they could have become even the highest among the Brahmins. The son of Dirghatamas through a Sudra servant woman become a celebrated Rishi, established Rishikulas and made hymns for the Rig Veda. Again, the Rishis Kavasha and Vatsa were born of Sudra mothers who were servants. Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata, was the son of a fisherwoman. In the Vedic age the caste system was very flexible. The difference then between the Brahmin and the Sudra lay in the Vedic period only in religious observance. Consequently a Sudra was not allowed at the Vedic sacrifices. Religious difference played an important role in the development of caste, as Jolly, Winternitz and Fick have pointed out.

The deterioration of the position of the Sudras and the stiffening of the caste system appeared during the age of the Brahmanas which are commentaries on the hymns in the Vedas. The determination of the date of the Brahmanas is by no means easy. There are varying views ranging from 9th century BC to 4th century BC. It is notable that a low position was accorded to women similar to that of the Sudras. This is notable from the later Vedic period, as may be seen from *Satapatha Brahmana, Paraskara Grhyasutra* and the *Baudhayana Dharmasutra.* It is learnt that women

and sudras were held in contempt by several authors of the Dharmasastras and Puranas also. In the law books like those of Manu and Yajnavalkya women and sudras are described as lifelong slaves from birth to death.

The idea of superiority among castes may be said to have appeared with Kautilya of the 3rd century BC, who prescribed different duties for the people of different castes. The superiority complex among the higher castes was developed later. Even in the time of Kautilya the degradation of the Sudras was not marked, though the Sudras were regarded as workers and producers.

It should not be thought that in early times the Sudras were only manual labourers without any education. In fact in the early period there was no branch of study from which the Sudras were excluded. It is significant that the Sudras were not debarred from the study of the Vedas. Even according to Manu who appears to have flourished about the 2nd century AD, the Vedas could be learnt by any one from a competent Sudra and that a lesson of the highest virtue could be learnt even from a Chandala. Manu held that every one is born a Sudra; action alone makes one a dvija and knowledge of Brahma makes one a Brahmana. According to both Manu and Bhrigu the division into Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudras are not based on birth but on action guided by his inclination.

It must be remembered that in early times nobody appears to have adhered to the Varnashrama Dharma or caste duties. The Arthasastra, which to the best of our knowledge, lays down for the first time the functions of the different Varnas, states also that the Brahmins and Sudras were as keen fighters as the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas.

From the Jataka stories it is seen that the Brahmins lived even as farm hands, hunters and trappers of wild animals, while some Sudras were kings, chiefs and army commanders. Obviously therefore, it is clear that all the Sudras were not relegated to the menial service, as Manu makes it to be understood. The text of the Manusmriti, however, does indicate that some Sudras were occupying high positions. The geographical horizon of the Manusmriti was confined to the region north of the Vindhyas. But in the course of time the canons of Manu had their influence in the south too, and by that time the Sudras were accorded a low position. The main duty of the Sudras in the post-Manu period was to serve the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. They were required to remove dirt, filth and carcasses. Manu had ordained that the Sudras must be reduced to slavery either by purchase or otherwise, because they are created by God for the sake of serving others. (Manavadharmasastra VIII. 413)

In the Vedic period, there was no difficulty for any one to become a Brahmin provided one was

prepared to go through the dvija baptism. In the post-Vedic period even some eminent teachers of the Upanishad remained as Sudras, for to be a Brahmin was no *sine qua non* for respectability.

In the Rig Vedic days, the Brahmin would appear to have been a minor attendant at the Vedic sacrifices. It is notable that Brahmins are mentioned only in a few places in the Rig Veda; they had to sing hymns.

When the number of hymns that were to be sung alone increased, the Brahmins had to devote a considerable time in committing them to memory. First, the fathers sat with their sons and taught them how to chant the hymns. Then competent teachers among them may have been selected to teach groups of Brahmin boys. This appears to have been the beginning of the Gurukula; probably it served as the basis for the division of labour of later days. The privileged position of the Brahmin must have appeared about the Mauryan period.

The ascendancy of the Brahmin prestige from the time of Kautilya may be seen from the following ideas contained in the Arthasastra. (1) if any one of a lower caste abuses the habits of a higher caste, the fine shall increase from three 'panas' upward (commencing from the lower caste); (2) that the limb of a Sudra with which he strikes a Brahmin shall be cut off.

A still further deterioration of the position of the Sudras appeared with Manu. By his time the position of the Brahmins had become firmly extrenched, and Manu was very stern to the Sudras. For example, he says;

"Let a Sudra who commits adultery with a woman of twice-born, be placed on an iron bed well-heated, with fire kept ablaze with logs thrown continuously till the sinful wretch be burnt to death." (viii, 372 and 374)

Manu held that the Sudras must be reduced to slavery either—by purchase or without purchase, because they are created by God for the sake of serving others. (viii, 413)

The Brahmin superiority should be considered as commencing from this period which could not have been earlier than the Huna inroad to India in the 5th century AD. It may have taken a few centuries before the influence of Manusmriti was felt. After the Manusmriti became popular, the King, too, became subordinate to the Brahmins. In Manu's picture of society of Kshatriya supremacy has passed to the Brahmin. On the whole, Jolly and Fick are right in holding religious differences as an important cause of the origin and development, not of caste.

It must be noted that there where old sayings of Manu which were collected together as Manusmriti or Manava Dharma Sastra. According to legend there

were fourteen Manus. The Manusmriti itself refers to the Dharma Sastras of Atri, Gautama, Shaunaka and Vasishta. It is important to reiterate that the geographical horizon of the Manava Dharma Sastra is confined to the region north of the Vindhyas. It must be noted, however, that Vishnu Smriti which was written after the Smriti of Yajnavalkya and Manusmriti defines Aryavarta as not confined to the region described by Manu, but it applied to the hold of India.

The Manusmriti divides the society into two parts: the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The non-Aryans were called Anarya, Dasyu and Mlechcha. The term Dasyu also included the Chandalas, Shvapakas, etc.

Manu says: 'Let every man, according to his ability, give wealth to Brahmins, detached from the world and learned in Scripture; such a giver shall attain Heaven after this life.' (xi, 6). Very early in the statutes, a universal law is proclaimed, the spirit of which prevades the whole code. This law lays down that whatever exists in the Universe is all, in effect, though not in form, the wealth of the Brahmins, since the Brahmin is entitled to it all by his primogeniture and eminence of birth.

Among the Smritis and commentaries on them, the oftquoted one is Manusmriti and the popular version of it is one by Kalluka, who according to his own statement, was a Brahmin. By making Manu the creator of the world and receiving the law direct

from him, the Brahmins have given a divine origin to their law.

Manusmriti gives very valuable information, both sociological and religious. It traces step by step the history of the Brahmin supremacy; it shows how they rose from mere indigent mendicants to a priestly hierarchy. But it is important to remember that the Manusmriti did not provide for the cultural arrogance and exclusiveness of the Brahmins. In the Manava dharmasastra (II : 238 & 241) it is stated that a Brahmana, could learn the Vedas even from a Sudra.

The Brahmins' superiority in learning was due to their excellent system of compulsory education. The secret of the respect enjoyed by the Brahmins is given in Manusmriti itself for they possess the Veda. The Vedas are sealed books for 90% of the Hindus even today. When did this monopoly appear? It must have occurred considerably later than the time of Manu. Earlier, there does not seem to have existed a class restriction in the matter of education.

The date of Manu who gave the final shape to Manusmriti is not easily determinable. In the opinion of Monier Williams, the earliest version of Manusmriti does not appear before the 6th century BC. The other commentaries are of much later date; that of Medhatithi is estimated to be of the 9th century AD, while that of Kalluka is estimated by Kane as of 13th century AD. But the last text of Manusmriti which was in force for a long time seems to have appeared

about the third century AD. It must be remembered that the Manusmriti stands in close relation to the Mahabharata, which contains about a tenth of the 2,700 of Manu's code. So it is later than the Mahabharata and even later than the Arthasastra. In its present form the Manusmriti may be assigned to a period between 100 BC and AD 300.

DEVELOPMENT OF CASTE

The Brahmins took full advantage of the literary upheaval that took place during the patronage of the Guptas. They took the classical Sanskrit of the Gupta period as a medium of propaganda. They went through the ancient literature and suppressed those books that were inimical to their pretensions; they rewrote those that were favourable to them with additions and alterations to classical Sanskrit. Among the suppressed portions were those of the Vedas that held no claim to Brahmin superiority. Among those that were altered and added on were the Puranas, where the heroes are represented as doing homage to the Brahmins. Even the Gods were made to obey the Brahmins.

Manusmriti was revised and new clauses were inserted to give a legal status to the new relationship between their priest and the king. Since then the Brahmins became the de-facto rulers of India. Brahminism prospered in the court of kings.

A Brahmin's killing of a Sudra was pronounced to be equivalent merely to the killing of a cat, a mongoose, a frog, a lizard or crow. It was stated that to serve a Brahmin learned in the Vedas is the highest duty of a Sudra. The Brahmin is by right the chief of this whole creation. He may without hesitation take the property of a Sudra for the purpose of a sacrifice, because a Sudra has nothing to do with sacrifices. If a Sudra mentions the name and class of the twice-born with contumely an iron nail ten fingers long shall be thrust red hot into his mouth. If he arrogantly teaches Brahmins their duty, the king shall cause hot oil to be poured into his mouth and into his ears. But no reciporal punishments are prescribed for cantankerous Brahmins. This is inconsistent with what was stated earlier (Manava Dharma Sastra II : 238 & 241) that a Brahmana could learn the Vedas even from a Sudra.

The master stroke in Brahmanic diplomacy was the creation of new orders of Kshatriyas by dvija baptism from the barbarians who came to India and from the indigenous Sudras who looked for social superiority. As will be seen later, this scheme did not work properly in the extreme south where a well-defined class of Kshatriyas did not exist.

Formation of New Castes

The formation of new castes is not so common as that of subcastes within a caste. The creation of

new subcastes is due to the following causes: (1) sometimes it is caused by migration to different parts of the country; (2) sometimes a new subcaste is brought into existence by the adoption of a religious cult; as Sir Alfred Lyall has said, "sects always tend to become sub-castes": e.g. Kabirpanthis; (3) subcastes are also formed by the adoption of new (and it is believed) reformed customs such as are followed by higher castes: e.g. by forbidding the remarriage of widows or by adopting a certain nicety about food; (4) another common cause is the adoption of new occupations. There have also been cases in which the adoption of a more dignified occupation has enabled subcastes to join other castes of a better status.

The early European observers regarded the caste system as an artificial creation, as a device of a clever priesthood for the permanent division and subjection of the masses or even as the creation of a single law-giver.

Thus Abbe Dubois, among others, speaks of it as the ingenious device of Brahmins and clearly regards it as made by and for them. Ghurye holds the same view. He says: 'Caste is a Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of India by the Brahmin prospectors." He regards caste as having arisen as a result of a racial difference and that endogamy, the outstanding feature of the system was first developed by the Brahmins in the plains of North India, and hence

conveyed as a culture trait to other areas. But some writers have argued that it could not have been the ingenious creation of the Brahmins and they are of opinion that the origin of the caste is organic rather than artificial. See the views of Nesfield, Ibbleston, Dahlamann, Blunt, Senart, Hutton (p.173 ff) Sarat Chandra Roy, etc. Hutton's view is acceptable.[12]

1. *Nesfield* regarded caste as a natural product of society in the creation of which religion played no part at all. He thinks that *function* and function alone was the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up.

2. *Denzil Ibbleston* held that caste is little more than an ordinary class society, made rigid, and he puts forth the tribal and religious explanation.

3. *Risley*, like several others, relied mainly on the theories of race and hypergamy to explain the caste system.

4. *Senart* held that caste is the normal development of ancient Aryan institutions which assumed that form in the struggle to adapt themselves to the conditions with which they came into contact in India.

5. *Sarat Chandra Roy* held that the Hindu caste system was rather the outcome of the interaction between the Indo-Aryan varna system on the one hand and the tribal system of the pre-Dravidian and the occupation class system of Dravidian on the other.

6. *Hutton* opines that the pre-Dravidian taboo on food and marriage based on a fear of the evil mania of strangers is responsible for the caste system.

Though several other writers have offered various explanations, it appears that Hutton provides a conclusion when he points out that the geographical isolation of India, the primitive association of power of transmission of qualities with food, primitive beliefs about *totemism*, mania and soul-stuff of like matter, ideas about ritual purity and pollution and the possibility of purification, the cultural role of the joint family and the institutions of ancestor-worship and the sacremental meal, the belief in past and future births and the karma theory, the beliefs in the magic associated with various occupations, economic guilds, the clash between matrilineal and patrilineal ways of life and between races resulting in colour prejudice and notions about superiority and inferiority, and the development of society into religious classes with exclusive privileges, all these factors were operative in the evolution of the caste system. Though several scholars, European and Indian, have devoted much attention to the study of caste, the systematic study of the lower orders in ancient India is still a desideratum.

3

RISE AND GROWTH OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

It is commonly believed that the caste system appeared in Tamilaham in the Sangam age. But we do hear of certain denominations which pertain to an earlier, i.e., the pre-historic epoch. Thus we hear of the Vettuvar, Villiyar, Irular and Pallar in the Sangam works. But they appear to have been the descendents of the pre-Tamil or pre-historic people belonging to the Proto-Austroloid or Negroid stock. Perhaps the Tudiar, Panar, Parayar and Kadambar also belonged to the class of original tribes. True, these names are traceable to Tamil, as for example, those who played on the Parai or drum were called Paraiyar. But while the name could have appeared later the people to whom the name applied might have been the earliest inhabitants.[13]

In the Purananuru there is a reference to the four castes: 'Verrumai terinda narpalullum.'[14]

Obviously this specifies the Indian traditional four-fold caste system. Perhaps, even much earlier, i.e., by the time of Tolkappiyam, which appears to have been composed prior to the classics of the third Sangam, the four castes are specified, though by different names. Tolkappiyar designates them as Andanar, Arasar, Vaisiyar and Vellalar. Whether the Vellalar were equated with the Sudras or not has been a matter of controversy; in later times the Vellalas formed only one section of the Sudras. Perhaps the entire class of Sudras of the North Indian classification was then described in Tamilaham as Vellalar. However, this difference in the nomenclature is inexplicable.[15]

It is notable that the kshatriyas as such never figured in Tamilaham. The 'Vendar', the Tamil equivalent, was a composite class sometimes consisting of Vaisyas also; this difference from the North Indian practice is inexplicable.

Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyaṣ were considered by Tolkappiyar as Dvijas, and as such, they alone were entitled to wear the sacred thread. This is clearly an Aryan practice. No reference is found in any of the Sangam works also to people of any non-Brahmin castes wearing it.

A doubt arises whether the Aryans had imposed their entire Varna distinction among the Tamils before the Sangam age. One has to remember the variations in regard to nomenclature, in respect of

Tolkappiyar's description of the duties and privileges of the various castes from the theoretical prescriptions of the Aryans are noticed. For instance, though warfare is the traditional avocation of the Kshatriyas, Tolkappiyar enunciates different prescription at various places of his work. In one context he says that the weapons of war can be handled by Vendar as well as Vaisyas,[16] at another, he states that the Sudras too, if commissioned by kings, are entitled to handle weapons.[17] Moreover, Tolkappiyar maintains that Brahmins, too, could become kings at times.[18] Again, we learn from several Sangam classics that Maravar and Malavar were included among fighters. Thus the Aryan four-fold classification must have penetrated into Tamilaham but gradually and that accounts for the variations.

The indigenous social stratification among the early Tamils was based on physiographic distinctions, which led to different occupations. The five-fold divisions Palai, Kurinchi, Mullai, Marudam and Neydal appear clearly in the Sangam works. The resistance of the regions came to be known respectively as the Maravar, Kuravar, Ayar, Ulavar and Paradavar. But the distribution was largely conventional: transgressions of the regional barriers in respect of occupations were not infrequent. Thus, for example, in Kurinchi, spinning of cotton yarn is known to have been undertaken. The tending of cows was not confined to the Mullai. It is learnt that

early in the morning the sound of churning curd was heard from the houses in Palai, and presumably it must have been common in other regions as well. It appears that the Kurava from the Kurinchi territory could settle in the Mullai land and become an Idaiya (shepherd or cowherd); if he came to Marudam and took to cultivation he would become a Vellalan. Similarly a Vellalan could settle in the Kurinchi land and become a Kurava. Even a fisherman could change his occupation; but this was rarely done, because his training was more of a specialized kind that those of the people of Kurinchi, Mullai and Marudam. However, the flexibility that existed in the Sangam age is different from the occupational division of the Varnashrama Dharma of the Aryans. In Tamilaham of the Sangam age there was a fusion of the horizontal and vertical divisions of society.

We see that by the age of the Sangam classics numerous professions had appeared. The question arises as to how far the entry into the various professions was governed by birth. In other words, the question is whether the caste system, the typical institution of Hinduism, had appeared in the Sangam age in its full form.

Sometimes a facile view is put forward that the early Tamils, including those of the Sangam age, had no caste distinction and that caste was introduced only by the Aryans. This does not seem to be fully borne out by the known facts. In the first place, though we hear of Brahmins, we do not find the

other divisions so clear-cut as in the Aryan system. The Kshatriya is hardly mentioned; on the other hand, as stated earlier, peoples called Maravar, Malavar and others formed the warriors. The duties assigned to the Vaisyas and Sudras, too, were discharged by several classes of people. If the four-fold caste system based on colour were introduced systematically by the Aryans these imperfections and lacunae are inexplicable.

Secondly, in the Sangam works themselves, we find the mention of several groups which became the basis of caste organisation in later times. There are numerous divisions which were not contemplated in the Aryan system of caste based on colour.

What appears probable is that there emerged among the Tamils social divisions based upon their occupations which were determined largely by the region in which they lived. Gradually, the Kuravar, Ayar, Vellalar, Maravar and Paradavar, the people of Kurinji, Mullai, Marudam, Palai and Neydal respectively, tended to become endogamous groups. Pre-marital love and marriage seem to have normally occured on the basis of these divisions of society. But soon, within the age known as that of the Sangam epoch itself, there appeared subdivisions among the five divisions. These subdivisions were based on further occupational distribution on the one hand and the differences in economic position on the other. Thus, for example, a distinction arose

between Vettuvar and Kuravar, the former denoting hunters and the latter hillmen pursuing more docile occupations. Moreover, among the Kurinji people who are originally known as Kuravar, there appeared another subdivision. Economically the lower section came to be known as Kodiyar and Kodichiyar while the upper one was continued to be called Kuravar and Kurattiyar. Subsequently, groups pursuing auxiliary occupations appear like the smiths and potters, and in course of time, even further subdivisions rise among them. Occupation determined the caste, and sometimes occupations transgressed the barriers the caste, and sometimes occupations transgressed the barriers of the old regional division. Thus, for example, in Kurinchi, spinning of cotton yarn was done.

We hear of several sub-castes in Purananuru, viz., the Mallan, Kuttan, Panan, Kadamban, Tudiyan, Paraiyan and Pulaiyan. Clearly these groups came into being on the basis of the different occupations pursued by them. But it is important to remember that the same anthology, Purananuru (183) shows that the conception of the four-fold divisions on the Aryan pattern had been known and adopted. Moreover, Purananuru accords a higher social position to the Brahmin. Stanza 224 of Purananuru says that Brahmins performed 'Veda Velvi', i.e., sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas. Brahmins devoted their time to learning and the patronage of Vedic lore. It was believed that those who caused

harm to Brahmins were heinous sinners. Kings patronized Brahmins by bestowing gifts of lands on them. It is interesting to learn that Ahananuru (337) speaks of the carrying of messages as having been entrusted to Brahmins. Tolkappiyam and *Tirumurugarruppadi also prescribe the role of* messengers to Brahmins. Padirruppattu describes their six-fold duties (3rd Decad: 24).

It does not, however, seem reasonable to assume that all the Brahmins in early Tamil Nadu were Aryan immigrants from the north. The persistence even to this day of divisions among the southern Brahmins into Vadama, Brihacharanam and Ashtasahasram shows that only one section of Brahmins had come from the north. The others were all indigenous people of Tamilaham who were enlisted in the class of Brahmins.

The few who came brought their ideas, institutions and culture with them into the new country. Almost from the outset the Brahmin immigrants sought the favour of the ruling king and succeeded in establishing their influence in the royal courts. In due course, this led to their acquisition of a lofty position in society and cultural set-up of the indigenous people, a total supplanting of the old by the new was impossible. What occured, therefore, was a social and cultural fusion.

This was reflected in the caste system. The indigenous divisions and sub-divisions based entirely

on occupations came to be amalgamated with the four-fold division based on colour. In actuality only the rise of the Brahmin caste was the immediate effect of this change. The other sub-divisions of the Aryan caste were later attempted to be yoked into the existing order, although the Kshatriya and Vaisya groups have always remained numerically small.

In this connection it is noteworthy that the advent of the Buddhists and Jains into the Tamil country was indirectly responsible for certain changes in the caste system in the south. There was acute rivalry between Brahmins on the one hand and Buddhists and Jain on the other. An inevitable result of this rivalry was an increase in the rigidity of the caste system. The privileges of caste were jealously guarded. Another result was the growth of numerous subcastes which appeared side by side with the increased rigidity of the system.

The caste system assumed an hereditary character even in the Sangam age. But there was a considerable measure of laxity in the choice of occupations. For example, Nakkirar, the Brahmin, took to conch-cutting and to the trade on bangles. They were called 'Velapparpar'. There were many merchants, artisans and agriculturists besides Brahmins who took to the higher arts of learning and composing poems. The kings who were considered Kshatriyas married from the Vellala caste and some Vellalas became kings, too.

Attempts to classify the castes on the basis of racial origin have been made by certain writers. V.A Smith thought that the Villavar or the bowmen were akin to Bhils and that they, as well as the Minavar or fishermen represented the earliest inhabitants and that they were akin to the aboriginal tribes in Malaya, Australia and other countries.

M. Srinivasa Aiyangar stated (in his Tamil Studies pp. 61 ff) that the Valayar, Pallar, Sanar, Idaiyar, Maravar, Paraiyar, Kaikkolar, Kammalar, Vanniyar, Kallar and Ambalakkarar were either Nagas or were descendents of a mixed race of Nagas and Dravidians. He holds that Kuravas alone represented the pure Nagas. This seems to be an over simplification of a complex problem. The Nagas appear in various places of India and at different stages of her history. Though no satisfactory explanation of their origin has been provided, it seems that they were of proto-Austroloid stock. There appears to have been an admixture of this element with the Dravidian population. To differentiate the Aryan from the others in South India is not also an easy affair. There had occurred such a admixture of the Aryan and Dravidian elements that except in respect of a small minority, the demarcation is not historically valid. A certain measure of wishful thinking on the one hand, and an attempt to read the present into the past on the other, have vitiated the proper approach to the study of this question of caste, its origin and development.

While one extreme school of writers blames the Aryans for having introduced the caste system into the south, the opposite school holds that the Aryans who came to the south were the harbingers of culture into a barbarous country and all that is admirable in the Tamil civilisation is a consequent product of the advent of the Brahmins.[19] Neither of these extreme views is borne out by the known facts of history. We have already seen that caste in its entirety was not an importation from outside. Regarding the other extreme views of the Aryan culture having been the only basis of the Tamil civilisation, as represented by the Sangam classics and the later works, it must be observed that though there is an admixture of Aryan ideas and practices even in the Sangam age, it is incorrect to think that the Aryans came and imported *en bloc* their ideas either totally discarding or destroying the existing culture. In fact, the Aryans absorbed some of the ideas and institutions of the Tamils. If the Tamils had not built up a civilisation worth the name before the advent of the Aryans, the later Tamil culture would have been a mere replica of the North Indian civilisation which is not the case, judged from any standard. In fact, it is incorrect to speak of the Aryanisation of South India, as is frequently done. Assuredly the impact of Aryans on Tamilaham is not comparable to the Romanisation of Gaul. If an European comparison were to be sought at all, it would be more appropriate to compare it with the Greek contact with the Aegean civilisation as a result of which the later Hellenic culture developed.

That the Aryan culture was not introduced into Tamilaham *in toto* is clear from the circumstance that the distinctive Aryan pattern of caste did not establish itself completely supplanting the existing divisions. As seen earlier, there was an amalgamation of the indigenous and exotic patterns i.e., the occupational and colour bases. This is evident from the Sangam classics which speak of both classes of subdivisions of society. That the exotic system took some time before it could be recognised as the important social factor is seen from the circumstance that while Purananuru makes just a mention of the fourfold division and the numerous other castes based on occupation. Tolkappiyam gives a greater prominence to the Aryan or Varna basis of caste. However, Tolkappiyar speaks of the four castes in the Tamilian terminology; he mentions the Andanar (Brahmins), Arasar (Kings or Kshatriyas), Vaisyar and Velalar (cultivators, corresponding to Sudras). Obviously he groups the large class of people engaged in various occupations into those of brahmins, rulers, businessmen and sudras. He provides details about each of the castes. Brahmins wore the holy thread, had the *Karaham* or the vessel containing sacred water for ceremonial ablutions, the *Mukkol* or a threepronged staff and Manai a wooden plank to be used as a seat. It is significant that Tolkappiyam says that the weapons of war are not to be handled by and but the men of the two middle castes, i.e., Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. Sudras too, if sent on government business, were entitled

to have weapons. Tolkappiyam states that Brahmins could also become kings. These are clear deviations from the traditional prescriptions.

A remarkable feature of Tolkappiyar's account of the castes is that it does not include the indigenous tribal divisions and subdivisions among castes. This suggests that Tolkappiyam was concerned with the enforcement of the northern pattern of caste. The only local adoption he makes is that he equates the Vellalas (Velanmandar), the cultivators, with the Sudras.

It is sometimes said that, as stated earlier, the stanza (335) in Purananuru seems to protest against the Aryan system of caste, holding that Tamilaham accepts only the division of the people into four, viz., Tudiyar, Panar, Paraiyar and Kadambar. But the context in which the work is set, as well as the restriction of the local divisions into the four groups mentioned above, show that it does not contain an exhaustive enumeration of all the units in Tamilaham. Set in the martial context, the poem speaks only of the martial or warlike sections among the people and it cannot be taken as an exhaustive division. On the whole, it seems that the regional divisions and their numerous subdivisions continued to be the basic structure in the Sangam age, while the Aryan classification was introduced from the north, which appeared as a kind of vertical differentiation cutting across the horizontal division already in existence.

By the time of the Tamil Epics, the two forces appeared to be getting entrenched, each in its own way. On the one hand, the supreme position of the Brahmins was established and strengthened by religious sanction, and on the other, the multiplication of subdivision among the regional groups of old increased. Ascetics and those who performed penance lived in separate quarters away from the madding crowd. The Brahmin purohit became the master of ceremonies in connection with marriages among the other sections of the Hindu community. Kannagi is said to have requested the God of Fire to exempt Brahmins and ascetics from the ravages of fire when the city was to be burnt.

But there is little attempt to enforce the rigid prescriptions in respect of the Kshatriya and Vaisya castes. The royal armies did not consist of Kshatriyas but of Maravar or Eyinar, who according to the Aryan classification, must have been assigned to the Sudra group. Again, trade appears to have been common to the Vaisya and Vellalas. Alongside of this relaxation in the fourfold classification the multiplication of subdivisions in the regional groups went on apace. The smiths are grouped more rigidly into blacksmiths, goldsmiths and carpenters. Weavers, cobblers and other groups emerge. Differentiations in the social scale of superiority appear clearly in the age of Sangam. The idea of untouchability on the part of certain castes comes into vogue by the time of the Epics. Not only the Brahmins but certain sections of

Vaisyas also dreaded pollution by members of the lower caste. For instance Silappadikaram says that the goldsmith took care to be at a distance from Kovalan, the Vaisya. Though even in the Sangam age certain sections like the Pulaiyar and Paraiyar were treated as low born, the practice of untouchability among the higher sections of the Sudras was a development of the later period, namely that of the Epics.

In the Sangam age itself the emergence of a large number of sub-castes among the last or the so-called Sudra category is a notable feature. Thus, for instance, from the Sangam works we find references to the undermentioned groups : Alavar, Idaiyar, Iiyavar, Umanar, Ulavar, Eirriyar, Kadambar, Kammiyar, Kalamar, Kuyavar, Kuravar, Kurumbar, Kuttar, Kollar, Kosar, Tachchar, Tudiyar, Terpakar, Tunaiyar, Paradavar, Paraiyar, Panar, Pulaiyar, Porunar, Malavar, Vadugar, Vannar, Vanigar and Vedar. They were all occupation-oriented divisions. But so far as our knowledge goes, there was no inhibition among them in respect of interdining. It is presumable that restrictions on inter-marriage between the various castes, however, seem to have gradually emerged even during the Sangam age. In the north the multiplication of *jatis* and the increase of caste restrictions developed in the period of the Dharmasutras, several centuries after the Vedic age. Perhaps similar tendencies appeared only after the Vedic age. Perhaps similar tendencies appeared only in the Sangam and post Sangam epochs.

When could the Aryans have introduced their pattern of stratification based on Varna into Tamilaham? From the circumstantial evidence it is possible that the introduction of the Northern caste system into the Andhra country took place in the age of the Satavahanas. During that period new sub-castes appeared on an occupational basis such as golikas (shepherds) and halikas (ploughmen). We learn that Satakarni I who ascended the throne about 189 BC performed a horse sacrifice. These provide some indications that in the Andhra country the Aryan ideas and the Varnashrama system had taken root before the 2nd century BC. Not only that; some of the Satavahana kings were keen on preserving the Chaturvarnya pattern or Varnashrama Dharma scrupulously. Gautamiputra Satakarni (c. AD 80–104) was a great supporter of the Brahmins. An inscription records how an Andhra King Vilivayakura II destroyed about AD 126 a Saka chief and 'prevented the mixing of the four castes'.

It is not too much to hold that about this time the Aryan caste system entered the Tamil country too. The fact that it presented the features of the Aryan pattern of caste indicates that by that period, probably before the Tolkappiyar's time (2nd or 1st century BC) it had found its way into Tamilaham. But it must have been introduced gradually; however, by the time of the Great Pallavas it became firmly rooted. We find Mahendravarman II (c. AD 668–70) insisting on the preservation of the Varnashrama system.[20] In fact, the Pallavas were *par excellence* the harbingers of Aryanism into the Tamil country.

It was during their period that the dominance of the Brahmins in Tamilaham became pronounced. The Pallavas exalted the Brahmins.[21] It was beginning from the time of the Imperial Pallavas that the kings and chiefs extended a reception to Brahmins and settled them in separate villages, which were known as 'Agraharas'. Since they were endowed to Brahmins they were also known as Brahmadeyas. It was for the purpose of patronising religion that Brahmins were invited and settled. In the Madras Museum Plates there is a reference to a group of Brahmins brought from Magadha and settled in the south.

Belonging to the Pallava period there are several grants bestowed on Brahmins by rulers for studying the Vedas and Vedangas.[22] Several sub-castes among non-brahmins had arisen. For example, an inscription of the Pallava king Nandi Pottaraiyar speaks of 'Aruvai Vanigar' who were cloth merchants. In their own turn Brahmins are said to have gifted lands to a Vishnu temple, Jain Palli and Pidari shrine and also for a Vyakarana Hall.

Only castes with distinctive characteristics are noticed here:

KADAVAR

A peculiar caste name figuring in the Pallava and later inscriptions is that of the Kadavar. Perhaps,

Kadava was the same as *Kaduvetti*, a name applied to the Pallavas because they cleared several wooded regions and made them suitable for occupation. More probably Kadavar denoted a class of people who lived in the forests. Was it the name of a caste also?

TATTALIKOTTUVAR

In South India, the age of the Pallavas witnessed the construction of temples. Among the attendants attached to the temples from the time of the Pallavas were the Tattalikottuvar. Probably they were drummers who formed from this time a separate caste. Dr. Minakshi's view is that it did not specify a caste because the Muktesvara inscription suggests that a Brahmin was employed for the purpose. This might have been a matter of chance. It is probable that in the beginning, i.e., in the age of the Pallavas those who beat the metallic plate during the time of offering were known as Tattalikottuvar to whatever caste they belonged. Very soon, however, a class of drummers belonging to a non-brahmin caste emerged. 'Tattalikotti' occurs in the Tandantottam Plates, and Krishna Sastry seems to be right in considering them as a caste of drummers. In certain other inscriptions of the Pallava period Tattalikottuvar are referred to as musicians and pipers attached to the temple. It is found from an inscription of the time of Kampavarman[23] that as many as sixteen

Tattalikottuvar were appointed for service in a temple and the probability is that they formed a troupe of drummers and musicians.

UVAICCAN

We hear also of Uvaiccan or Uvaccan in the Pallava times. They were in all probability drummers different from those who beat the metallic plates. When exactly they constituted a distinct caste and whether they were endogamous with the Tattalikottuvar it is difficult to judge.

ADIGALMAR

Connected with the temple we hear for the first time under the Pallavas the Devaradiyar or Devadasis under the name of Adigalmar. The probability is that this class of women attendants and dancers must have arisen with the emergence of structural temples. The term *Adigalmar* originally denoted women dancers. They were otherwise known as 'Manikkattar' and 'Kanigaiyar'. In the big temples of the Chola period there were numerous women dancers. An inscription in the Tanjavur temple states that Rajaraja transferred a number of women from the different parts of Cholamandalam as dancers attached to the temple of Rajarajesvara.[24]

Archakas or temple priests were appointed among Brahmins from an early time, at any rate from the Pallava period. The names of priests which occur in Pallava inscriptions testify to this. For instance, we find mentioned the names, Ananta Sivan, Ananta Sivacharya, Dattasivan, Pullasarman and Madhusudana Sivan. Those attached to Siva temples were variously called Archakas,[25] Gurukkal[26] and Sivabrahmanas or Saivacharyas[27]

In later Pallava inscriptions we find that those who performed the divine rites inside Vishnu temples were designated by the title 'Bhatta'. Sridhara Bhatta, the son of Damodara Bhatta, was doing the archana inside the Sri Govardhana temple at Uttaramerur in the time of Kampavarman.[28]

In the Tiruvallikkeni inscription of Dantivarman the priest of the temple is called Kulamkilar. Dr. Minakshi thinks that Kula stands for Devakula and that it was used for both Siva and Vishnu temples. The literacy meaning of 'Kulamkilar' is temple proprietor and it may denote either the temple authorities or the temple priests. But the greater probability is that it denoted the authorities or owners of the temple. It must be noted that 'Kilar' in later times denoted proprietors or owners of land. Tavasikal or temple sweepers and Vayil-kelpar, perhaps temple officers, were non-brahmin members of the temple staff.

AGAMBADIYAR

An agricultural caste figuring in the Pallava inscription is that of the Agambadiyar. In the Uttaramerur inscription of Dantivarman this agricultural caste of peasants or ryots is known as 'Ahambadi Udaiyans'. They were not an affluent class of people and they lived in humble houses in the Pallava period.

IDAIYAR

Among other castes of the Sudras indirect references to Idaiyar are found in the later Pallava inscriptions. Idaiyar denoted then, as later, the cattle-breeders. But it must be remembered that the Idaiyar are mentioned in the Sangam works too. Probably the poets, Idaiyar Nedunkiranar and Idaiyan Sendan Korranar, authors of certain verses in the Ahananuru, were members of this caste of shepherds.

ILAVAR

We find references in later Pallava inscriptions to Ilamputchi which meant a tax on 'Ilavar' who were toddy drawers. Therefore, the sub caste of Ilavar appears to have arisen in or before 7th century AD.[29]

Thus we find that during the Pallava and early Pandya rule certain subdivisions of the Sudras had

emerged. They were based on the different occupations pursued. We cannot assert that we have a knowledge of all the sub-castes that had existed during this period, because it cannot be claimed that the sources of our information, namely the inscriptions and literary references, are exhaustive.

CASTES IN THE CHOLA AND LATER PANDYA PERIODS (10th CENTURY TO 15th CENTURY)

There is clear evidence to show that in the age of the Imperial Cholas the caste system became rigid. This was primarily so because this age witnessed the increased prominence given to temples, and it is well known that temples and society of the medieval period enforced the caste regulations rigorously. These restrictions in their turn led to the growth of subcastes with differences in usage and social status among them. The position of the castes occurring in the original sources of the period may now be considered.

The Brahmins became very dominant, not only as temple priests and leaders of the religious observances, but also as ministers and officers as well as senapatis of the governments. Primarily they were continued to be respected for their learning and religious authority. In AD 1129, the Sabha of Tirupper recorded in an inscription their gratitude to a certain Bhatta whose prayers were believed to have been of great use to the village in a critical

stage of its history. Further, regarding the position of other castes, the bhattas were considered the authorities. Regarding the anuloma caste, the bhattas of a village in the reign of Kulottunga I, consulted the Sastras and gave their verdict on the professions to be followed by the anuloma caste of Rathakars.

The *Kshatriyas*, as such, do not figure prominently. The group of traders and businessmen increased with the growth in the affluence of the kingdom and they became Vaisyas. But the dividing line between the Vaisyas and high class Sudras was not clearly drawn. Economic position combined with social gradation determined the rank of people in the Vaisya-Sudra relationship.

MIXED MARRIAGES

During this period we hear of several cases of mixed marriages and of the decisions given by the learned among the Brahmins regarding the status of the offspring of such mixed marriages. Where a man of particular caste married a woman of a lower caste it was called anuloma marriage but where, on the other hand, the woman married a man of a lower caste it was called pratiloma marriage. Such unions and the subsequent ones between the offspring of such unions are held to account for the rise of several sub-castes. The treatises of Vasistha, Buddhayana, Gautama and others and above all the Manusmriti

give us the lists of the castes so formed. In general principle the *pratiloma* castes rank below the *anuloma* and at the bottom of the scale are the chandalas, born of a Sudra male and a Brahmin female and other mixed castes of Chandala percentage. The commentators of Manu were at variance with each other in decreeing the status of the different types of mixed marriages. Therefore, it was left to the elders and particularly the learned among the Brahmins to decide each question as it arose.

As mentioned earlier, in the reign of Kulottunga I, the bhattas of Rajasarya-Chaturvedimangalam consulted the sastras and laid down the professions to be followed by the anuloma caste of Rathakars.[30] From an inscription of AD 1169, the class of Rathakars is seen to have included goldsmiths, blacksmiths and stone masons as well as carpenters.[31]

VELLALAS

An influential community of the non-brahmins is that of the Vellalas. There are several categories of the Vellalas. In the Chola period itself the distinction between Tondaimandalam, Vellalas, Karkarta Vellalas, Nanchinad Vellalas and Kongu Vellalas had emerged based on the region occupied by them and on the basis of vegetarianism adopted by the different sections. Invariably they were landowners

and cultivators. There are variations in the customs and manners of the different sections of the Vellalas. While all the other categories of Vellalas employ Brahmin priests in their sacred ceremonies, the Kongu Vellalas employed sometimes their own caste men for the purpose; the barber, dhobi and others also played their allotted part in the ceremonies.[32]

Some early writers thought the Kongu Vellalas like the rest of the people of the region had come from the Ganga country in the Mysore country. That was based only on the phonetic similarity between the Kongu and Ganga. In reality the Kongus are among the earliest of the Tamils. There are several references in the Sangam works like the Purananuru and Ahananuru in the Kongu country and Kongu people. There were no doubt frequent contacts with the neighbouring Chera, Chola and Pandya powers as well as with the Hoysalas, Muslims of the South, Vijayanagar and Mysore powers.

Probably it was about the 9th century that the various subdivisions among the Vellalas appeared. Principally they were connected with agriculture. But from an early period there had emerged the distinction between 'Uluvittunbar' and 'Ulutunbar.' Though in later times there were interchanges among them, up to the end of the Imperial Chola period, certain sections like the Kondaikkatti Vellalar and Karkarta Vellalar were pre-eminently 'Uluvittunbar' or landlords.

The original stronghold of the Kondaikkatti Vellalas was Tondaimandalam. Later they spread from there throughout Tamil Nadu. Some of them were employed in the King's court and others as military leaders during expansionist times.[33]

Burton Stein has advanced an interesting theory. He describes the Vellalar-Brahmin relations as an 'alliance,' and adds that in South India, peasants held the balance of secular power. He adds that this 'alliance' formed one reason for the failure of a Kshatriya tradition in medieval south India. This seems to be an exaggeration. Though some Vellalas were employed as ministers and generals, it is too much to speak of an 'alliance' between Brahmins and Vellalas. Nor did the failure of the Kshatriya tradition appear only in Tamil Nadu.

Steve Barnett[34] says, 'judging from present Kondaikkatti Vellala organization, the particular economic and social conditions created configurations in caste, culture and local hierarchy that persisted until the advent of British imperialism.' The sense of superiority persists to this day, though covertly.

All the Kondaikkatti Vellalar even within the same village do not intermarry. Within each village cluster there are smaller endogamous units called *Vakayaras*.

Apart from the proliferation of individual Vellalar castes, all Vellalars can be divided into vegetarian

(Saiva Vellalar) and non-vegetarian. Among the Saiva Vellalars, Sekkilar of the 12th century and Meykandar of the 13th century were famous. Sekkilar was a Kondaikkatti Vellala, while Meykandar was a Saiva Vellala belonging to the Kalappalar group. His father was Achyuta Kalappalar.

When did the distinction between Saiva and other Vellalas emerge? Though the influence of Jainism and Buddhism had appeared early it was with the advent of the Bhakti movement in the 7th century AD, that there seems to have appeared a great measure of emphasis on vegetarianism. Many of the hymnists at temples were vegetarian Vellalas.

CHETTIS

The name Chetti figures in Tamil literature beginning from the time of Manimekalai where we hear of Saduvan, a member of the mercantile community. In fact, through the ages Chettis had been associated with commercial activities. Though the Nattukkottai Chettis are the most outstanding group of this class, there were others like the Nagarattar Chettis, the Kasukkarar Chettis and Beri Chettis.

The Nattukkottai Chettis

A remarkably enterprising community of people of Tamil Nadu are the Nattukkottai Chettis. Traders and

money lenders for long, they had extended their activities over wide regions. They have been noted for their frugality though they spend lavishly on ceremonies. The Nattukkottai Chettiars are pious and charitable by nature. The famous temples at Chidambaram, Madurai and Tiruvannamalai have received considerable endowments and embellishments from rich Nattukkottai Chettiars. Being Saivites, they do not generally care for Vaishnava temples. Even among Saiva temples, only such as have special sanctity and have been sung about by the Saiva Nayanmar are patronised by them.

As in the case of several other communities there are legends regarding the origin of the Nattukottai Chettis. However, many Chettis believe that they belong to the Vaisya caste, though they do not wear the sacred thread and their original home was Kaverippattinam, from where they migrated to the regions in Madurai District on account of the persecution of a Chola monarch when they refused to give their daughters in marriage to him. Other people, however, speak of a different story; they allege that the Nattukkottai Chettis are the descendents of a Muslim man and Kalla woman. It is difficult to determine the truth of this, though the Nattukkottai Chetti men shaved their heads completely in the past.

Among the Nattukkottai Chettiars there are three sub divisions:

1. Sundaram
2. Ariyur and
3. Ilayattakkudi

Each subdivision is divided into seven exogamous septs called 'Koils'. The caste Panchayat was powerful and it exercised considerable control over the community. A custom among the Nattukkottai Chetti women in the past was that they did not cover their breasts. The Nattukkottai Chetti women had their ear lobes artificially dilated, but seldom wore ornaments in them. Now things have changed and they wear ear ornaments.

Beri Chettis

The Beri Chettis appear to have had an origin later than the Nattukkottai Chettis; however, there is a possibility that they had come into existence as a separate group before the 14th century AD. Though the Beri Chettis also claim themselves to be Vaisyas, they are grouped under the Left Hand Castes.

There is a tradition that the Beri Chettis originally lived in Kaverippattinam near Kumbakonam and when the Chola king wanted to marry a girl of the group, he expelled the members of the region. Another story is that when the king

wanted to marry a Beri Chetti girl the people adopted a stratagem. On the day fixed for the wedding all the Beri Chettis left the village after tying a black dog to the post of the marriage pandal. The king became furious and forbade people of all other castes to eat anything or even drink water from the Beris. It is believed that this led the Beris to join the Left Hand group.

There is rivalry between the Beri and the Komatti Chettis, each claiming superiority over the other. Some people consider the Komattis to be superior to the Beris. Among the Beris there are both vegetarians and non-vegetarians.

Komatti Chettis

They form an enterprising mercantile class settled in Salem, Coimbatore and Madras from the Telugu country beginning from the Imperial Chola period. In respect of the social hierarchy of caste they form an interesting group. They imitate Brahmin ways of life and they look down upon other non-Brahmins. They wear the holy thread and are noted for their opulence and thrift.

A peculiar thing about the Komattis is a legendary association of their caste with Madigas or Chakkiliyas. They are called 'Mid-day Madigas.' Many legends have been current in explanation of this. But they are not considered as trustworthy. Probably at some

distance time in the past a sexual connection must have taken place between a Komatti and a Madiga.

Another curious thing is that sometime after the 14th century the Komattis had become divided into Right and Left Hand Komattis. In the 18 century there was an acute conflict between these two sections among the Komattis in Madras. Finally a compromise was effected and they settled in different parts of the city—the Right Hand in the west and the Left Hand in the east.

Kudirai Chetty

An interesting community that flourished about the time of the Imperial Cholas is that of the Kudirai Chettis. There are references to them in the inscriptions of the Imperial Cholas. Their name indicates that they were traders on horses. It is presumed that they were merchants from the west coast of Kerala and that they were engaged in horse-trade between Arabia and the regions in South India through Kerala.

Foreign travellers who came to South India in the Medieval period like Marco Polo and Wassaf speak of the flourishing trade on horses between South India and foreign countries like Arabia and Burma. How long the Kudirai Chettis pursued their horse trade is not known. But it is probable that artillery became powerful with the advent of the Westerners. The influence of horse trade and with

that, the position of the Kudirai Chettis must have declined. Perhaps after the 17th century the Kudirai Chettis became merged with the Beri Chettis.

KALLAR

The Kallar have been known from a time earlier than the Imperial Chola period. They had some affinities with the Agambadiyar and Maravar who have been dominant in the Tanjavur, Tiruchirappali, Madurai and the southern Districts from an early time.

Some Kallar in the Tanjavur District had assumed titles as kings of the Pallavas. But there is no likelihood of their having any communal or racial connection with the Pallavas. Probably some victories won by the Kalla chieftains over the Pallavas induced them to assume this title. However, some Kallar like the Maravar enlisted themselves in Pandyan and Chola armies. The view that[38] the Kallar were only bandits and were not soldiers of an organized army is not correct. Perhaps after the overthrow of the Nayak rule as also in the pre-Pallavan period they resorted to highway robbery.

Regarding the marriage custom, usually a Kallan marries the daughter of his father's sister even in spite of disparity in age. The Kallans had been for long adopting a system of limited polyandry. But latterly it is being abandoned. They are a powerful

agricultural community in South Tamil Nadu. Their chief deity is Alagarswami who is the God installed in the famous temple of Alagarkoil.

MARAVAR

Having some affinity with the Kallar and Agambadiyar were the Maravar. The Maravar formed a caste as early as the Sangam epoch, at any rate by the time the Kalittogai was[36] composed. But from several of the Sangam classics it is found that the term 'Maravan' was employed to denote one who possessed martial valour. The Purananuru, for example in 31 : 9 and 43 : 11, Ahananuru 35 : 6 and 53 : 10; Ainkurunuru: 352 : 1 and Tirukkural : 778 : 1 employ the term Maravar in this general sense. Here we are concerned with the name Maravar denoting the caste. Probably the caste name itself was derived from the general sense of bravery. In fact the Maravar caste consists of a brave and warlike people and were employed as soldiers in war. But during times of peace, they and their kinsmen took to highway robbery.

The Maravar are found in the largest number in the southern Districts. In the political sphere they seem to have wielded considerable influence under the Pandyas. In fact the Pandyan monarchs are believed to have themselves belonged to the Marava caste.

The Maravar have been described as typical of the earliest Dravidians in India. The effects of Brahmanisation and Sanskritization have been least felt among the Maravar, Kallar and Agambadiyar. But they trace their legendary descent to gods and heroes of the Aryan mythology. It is needless to state that they are inventions of the mythmakers' ingenuity. However, all the legends lay stress on the valour of the Maravar. Maravar, like the Nadar, Vanniyar and several others claimed themselves to be Kshatriyas.

There are several subdivisions among the Maravas. The Kondayankottai Maravar form an important division. In their turn they are divided into six sub-tribes or as they call trees. Each tree is divided into three '*Kilais*' those belonging to the same tree are not allowed to intermarry. Among the Kondaiyankottai Maravans, a girl can never marry her mother's brother because they are of the same kilai. On the other hand the children of a brother and sister should, wherever possible, marry.

Though the educated among the Kallar and Maravar dislike their being characterized as castes of criminal propensities, the fact is that they were criminal tribes, more or less professional cattle thieves.[37] Members of the Marava and Kallar castes have become sensitive to such characterisations. For instance, a protest was made on 2nd January 1975 by Mr. Kandaswamy, M.L.A., Forward Bloc, against the reference to Maravar made in a school text book

that they were people who practised dacoity. This shows to what extent caste patriotism can go in controverting known historic facts.

Among the Maravar, Kallar and Agambadiyar, who were together described as 'Mukkulattor', marriage rarely takes place before puberty. Regarding the marriage celebrations among the Maravar zamindars there is a peculiarity. As stated in the Madras Census Report, 1891, a special custom obtaining among the Marava zamindars of Tirunelveli is the celebration of the marriage by means of a proxy for the bridegroom in the shape of a stick which is sent by the bridegroom and is set up in the marriage booth in his place. The Tali is tied by some one representative of the bridegroom and the marriage ceremony becomes complete.

Among the general body of Maravas and Kallans the marriage takes place in the same manner as among the Tamil non-brahmins. The marriage takes place in the house of the bride. However, the tying of the tali is done by the sister of the bridegroom. Thereafter the bride is taken to the house of the bridegroom where they sit side by side on a plank. They receive the blessings of the elders. A feast follows. In respect of the different sections of the Maravar and Kallar there are no doubt minor variations in the rituals and ceremonies.

Widow remarriage is permitted. Among the Maravas, Kallars and Agambadiyas both cremation

and burial take place. In connection with the final death ceremony a position of superiority is claimed by the Maravar, particularly over the Agambadiyas. This is seen from the circumstance that the water for washing the corpse of one class of Maravas of Ramananthapuram is brought by the Agambadiyas. Another is in connection with the cremation ceremony of the Maravas; instead of the son of the deceased, it is one Agambadiyan who carries the fire pot to the burial ground. But this is not now common. The Maravas themselves carry the fire.

KAIKKOLAR

As early as the Sangam age we hear of the Kaikkolar, a caste of weavers. We hear of them in inscriptions and literature beginning from the period of the Imperial Cholas. Ottakkuttan, the well-known Tamil poet, was a Kaikkola by caste and he has sung about the Kaikkolas. The Kaikkolas came to be known as Mudalis; some of them bore the suffix Nayanar. Some Kaikkolar were soldiers (Valperra Kaikkolar). The Kaikkolar have been called Senguntar (red dagger). That indicates their military prowess and warlike traditions. But the name Kaikkolan is stated to have been derived from Kai (hand) and Kol (Shuttle). This suggests the traditional association of the caste with weaving.

The Kaikkolas as a community have been divided into 72 Nadus or Desams. Of these 44

formed the 'Mel' (western) and 24 "Kil" (eastern) Nadus.

Some of the Kaikkola women became dedicated to temples and they became dancers. It became the practice for every Kaikkola family to dedicate at least one girl to temple service. But the Kaikkolan dancers were distinct from the Devadasis. However, in the post-Vijayanagar days there were intermarriages between Kaikkolars and Devadasis.

Curiously the men of the Kaikkolan caste belonged to the left hand group, but the Kaikkola dancer in the temple was considered to be a member of the right hand.

It is believed that the Nayak kings of Madurai were dissatisfied with the 'quality of cloth woven by the Kaikkolar and that they invited Kaikkolas from the Telugu country and settled them in Madurai and farther South. Some of them are said to have come from Maharashtra and Gujarat area. They have been known as Pattunulkarar. They became richer and more influential than the Kaikkolar.

NADAR

Apart from the legendary origin of the community, the view of Robert Caldwell is that Nadars were emigrants from the northern coast of Sri Lanka. He found there a caste bearing the name Shandror, of which, he said, shanar is etymologically a corruption.

He held that the Ilavas and Tiyars were also descendants of Shandror colonists from Sri Lanka. One group, known as the Nadans, entered Tirunelveli sometime in the age of the Imperial Cholas and after a time invited some shanars who had come to South Travancore to serve as climbers of palmyra trees. Eventually there was some fusion between the Nadars and Shanars, though later the Nadars of Virudhunagar, Sivakasi and Tirunelveli held themselves superior to the Shanar.

The Shanars and Nadars occupy a peculiar status. Their abstinence from liquor and beef and the circumstance that their widows are not allowed to marry again connect them with the higher section of non-Brahmins. On the other hand, their women were not allowed to wear cloth above their loins. Further, their association with toddy tapping was responsible for a lower social status; they were not allowed entry into temples or the use of public wells. Now the Nadars are generally an affluent community thriving in the sphere of commercial business.

The history of a small portion of the community, known as the Nadans, is notable. They seem to have been employed as tax gatherers by the Pandyas and later by the Nayaks. They were called 'Nadans' or lords of the land. As hereditary tax collectors, the Nadans held civil authority over the lands in their control. They were concentrated in

the region of Tiruchendur and worked as petty lords under the Poligars. In recent times there have been frequent quarrels between the Nadans and Nadars.

PALLIS

An early community is that of the Pallis. Apart from legends, they are definitely known to have been flourishing in the time of the Imperial Cholas. It is probable that the Pallis were local chieftains known as Sambuvarayar in the Chola country. Certain inscriptions of the time of Kulottunga III and Rajaraja III mention Sambuvarayan as a title of local rulers.

The Pallis claim a Kshatriya origin and legends connecting them with Kulasekhara Alvar one of the early kings of Southern Kerala, are current. In the age of the Nayaks of Tanjavur several Pallis assumed titles, Chera, Chola, Pandya, Sambuvarayar, Nayakar, Padayachi, Pillai, Reddi and so on. The Pallis of South Arcot are the most dominant among the Pallis.

Sanskritization is conspicuous among the Pallis. They imitate Brahmin ways. They tend to adopt vegetarianism; they also discourage widow remarriage.

CHAKKILIYAR

The Chakkiliyar form one of the lower castes. There is no mention of them in early Tamil literature. They seem to have come from the Telugu and Kannada regions. Though they are now Tamil speaking people, their earlier mother tongue was Telugu or Kannada. Perhaps they came to Tamil Nadu in the wake of the Vijayanagar invaders.

They are workers on leather. It is their duty to remove the dead cattle from villages. In return the Chakkiliyar have to supply leather for agricultural purposes.

A peculiar feature is that in the Madurai District the men of the Chakkiliya caste belong to the right hand caste while the women belong to the left.

PARAIYAR

One of the most downtrodden castes in Tamil Nadu is that of the Paraiyar. There has been a doubt whether they were known by the same name in the Sangam age. No doubt there is a mention of the Paraiyan in the Purananuru : 335 : 7; from which context it is seen that he belonged to the caste of drummers. On the other hand there is a view that the Paraiyan was known as Pulaiyan in the Sangam age. References to Pulaiyan are found in the

Purananuru : 217 : 1 and 562 : 39, as well as in the Kalittogai 68 : 18. In these contexts he is not only associated with drumming but also with several menial kinds of work. It seems that the genesis of the word Paraiyan is traceable to drumming; but that as a comprehensive term denoting the large scheduled class of the present, it came to be adopted only much later. The view that Pulaiya denoted the Paraiyan also seems acceptable. It may be noted that at present the Paraiyans are found throughout the Tamil country whereas the Puliayans denote a particular scheduled caste in Kerala.

In the inscriptions of Raja Raja I, this caste has been mentioned under the name 'Paraiyan'. In recent times several subsects have arisen among the Paraiyar, like Samban, Sangidian, Soliya, Konga, Morasu, Kilakkattai, Katti and Valangmattu.

There is a belief not only among the Paraiyar, but among others as well that they occupied in the past a much higher position than at present. Some of the privileges which they enjoyed for long seem to have been gained from the people of the higher castes. The lower but important village officers like Tallayari, Totti and Vettiyan have been generally held by the Paraiyar.

According to a legend the Paraiyans trace their descent to a Brahmin, who was cursed by Siva to be considered a Pariah for concealing a part of the meat intended to be offered to Lord Siva in order to

be given to his wife. Paraiyas wear a sacred thread in the course of their marriages and funerals; perhaps this is in pursuance of their legendary association with the Brahmin priest. It is notable that the Brahmins belonged to the Right Hand caste.

In early times the Paraiyas were drummers and labourers. They served as grave-diggers, watchmen and scavengers. But some Paraiyas took to weaving, and a large number of them became agricultural labourers and domestic servants. The Valluvar act as the priests of the Paraiyar. The Valluvar considered themselves to be of a caste superior to that of the Paraiyar; they did not eat or intermarry with the Paraiyar.

The Paraiyar were usually Saivas; but they were in fact demon worshippers. They worshipped not only several village gods and goddesses but they offered prayers to ghosts and goblins. In the period after 16th century many Paraiyas were converted to Christianity.

Polygamy is in vogue among the Paraiyar. Besides the legally wedded wife, the Paraiyan invariably had another woman who also served as the lady of the house. This led to frequent bickerings within the family. However, apart from this restricted bigamy, polygamy as such, is not adopted among the Paraiyar. Widow remarriage is common; though there is no formal ceremony in all cases.

AMBATTAN

Ambattan is the name of the barber, through the ages. He was also known as Navidan (Palamoli : 284 : 3). In later times he came to be known as Pariyari, Kudimagan and Panditan. The barber in due course became a musician, particularly a player on the pipe. Quite often he was a medicine man, having a knowledge of the Ayurveda system of medicine. The Ambattan women have been for ages the midwives in the Tamil country.

There is a tradition that the Ambattans are the descendants of the offspring of a Vaisya woman by a Brahmin.

It is interesting to find that Manu has accorded a curiously high position to the Ambattan. According to him Brahmins may eat food prepared by a barber within the precincts of a temple. It is remarkable that the high priests in the great temple of Jagannath is a barber.

There are both saivites and vaishnavites among Ambattans; but the majority are saivites. The vaishnavites are always vegetarians and teetotallers. However, the vaishnavites and saivites among the Ambattans intermarry. Widow remarriage is prohibited among the Ambattans.

The Ambattans belong to the Right Hand group of castes and do not eat with the Komatis and

Kammalans or food given by the Komatis or Kammalans, both of whom belong to the Left. However, they have no objection to shave Komatis or Kammalans.

KAMMALAR

An interesting community is that of the Kammalar or smith. There is a legend that they are a product of a mixed marriage. The Kammalar call themselves Visvakarmas (supposed to be descended from Visvakarma, the architect among Gods) and believe that they are even superior to Brahmins. They call themselves Acharis and Pattars and they claim a knowledge of the Vedas. Most of the Kammalas are vegetarians.

In the Sangam age, the Kammalar were known as Kammiyar and we find references to them in some of the Sangam classics. For example, the Kammalar are mentioned as goldsmiths in Narrinai: 94 : 4, 313 : 2, 363 : 4, in Nedunalvadai 87 and Purananuru 353 : 1, as coppersmiths in Narrinai 153 : 2. It may be noted that the Maduraikkanchi (521) speaks of them as weavers. Later, the Nanmanikkadigai (41: 1) refers to them as goldsmiths, carpenters and image makers. From early times they have been the leading custodians and promoters of the fine arts like architecture, sculpture and iconography.

In the Chola period, the Kammalar were not only goldsmiths and carpenters, but were also stone masons of high calibre. It is learnt from inscriptions at Kasuvur and Perur that they were granted certain privileages by some Cholra monarchs; but the name of the monarch is not known. The privileges were the blowing of two conches, the beating of drums, etc. Among other privileges granted were the construction of houses with two storeys and with double doors, the right to decorate the front of their houses with garlands of water liles and so on.

The Kammalas were well organized. The five divisions among them were goldsmiths (Tattan), brass-smiths (Kannan), Carpenter (Tachchan), stone mason (Kal tachchan) and blacksmith (Kollan or Karuman). The goldsmiths do not intermarry with the Kollan or Karuman; among the rest there is free intermarriage.

They wear the holy thread. From the age of the Imperial Cholas the Kammalar were members of the Left Hand caste. There are several stories regarding their origin and early position. However, conflicts between Kammalar and people of the Right hand castes were bitter. In Kanchipuram as well as in other towns of Tamil Nadu there were Right Hand and Left Hand temples, Mandapas and dancing girls. The Left Hand people like the Kammalas, refrained from any association with the Right Hand counterparts. With the end of the 19th century violent ruptures between the Left Hand Castes like those

of the Kammalas and the Right Hand Castes were common.

Only a few typical castes are considered here. There were numerous sub divisions among each of them. Always bgends were created speaking of the glorious origin of each of the castes. There has been a tendency on the part of all castes to hold aloft high traditions and an eagerness to ascend in social status.

4

THE RIGHT HAND AND LEFT HAND CASTES

A peculiar development of the caste system which affected the social history of Tamils and of the Kannadigas in a limited measure was the rise of the division of many castes into one or the other of the Right and Left hand castes. It was believed that each one of these two divisions had within its fold 98 castes. But it is not possible to determine the exact identity of the different castes included in the Right Hand category. The castes of the Left Hand are mentioned in an inscription at Aduturai.[39] The principal castes in the Right Hand group are known through institutions and traditions. Thus, for example the Right hand castes included the Paraiyar and Chetties. The prominent castes included in the Left Hand group were those of the Kammalas and Pallas. In later accounts the Valangai and Idangai castes are said to have formed subdivisions of the 18 major castes. The names of these 18 castes are

not known definitely. Generally the Brahmins and Vellalas did not range themselves under either of the Right or Left Hand castes.

The genesis of the division into Right and Left Hand castes is one of the riddles of South Indian history. There are, no doubt, various legends which ascribe the origin of this peculiar social division to one or other circumstance.

One held that, as desired by an early Chola King Arindama, a holy sacrifice was conducted by the sage Kasyapa and his assistants. In the conduct of that sacrifice the people of certain castes actively helped the sage. After the sacrifice was completed, the sage and their followers were safely conducted to a new colony in which they were to be settled. In this actual settlement of the saintly persons also, the people of those castes who helped them in the conduct of the sacrifices cooperated actively. They accompanied the sages carrying their umbrellas and slippers. When the sages alighted from their chariots the members of the non-brahmin castes who had cooperated with them all along stood on the left side of the chariots and helped them to alight from the chariots. The people of those castes came to be designated as those of the left hand castes; the other non-brahmin castes were known as members of the right hand castes.

The sages bestowed on the people of the left hand castes certain privileges like the use of the

horn, conch and bugle. They were also authorised to have as their symbols the feather of the crane and the loose-hanging human hair. This story about the origin and early history of the Left Hand castes is found in inscriptions discovered about the 12th century AD, during the Chola King, Kulottunga III. It is obvious that the entire account is incredible and that it is a later invention of some members of the Left Hand castes in order to assume an exalted status for themselves. A later inscription found at Aduturai records that the number of Left Hand castes was 91.

Another legend was set afloat by certain Kammalas. It may be noted that the Kammalar were the foremost among the Left Hand castes and that they claimed a social rank next only to that of the Brahmins. In fact at one stage there was acute rivalry between the Kammalas and Brahmins.[40] According to this legend the Kammalas were occupying a lofty position and they were the hereditary priests of the Cholas from early times. Veda Vyasa became jealous of their position and killed the Chola king, Parimala, in order to expel the Kammalas from power and installed Parimala's son as his successor. The new king was to expel the Kammalas who had so far considered themselves as Brahmins and claimed that they were the proud possessors of the Fifth Veda which was exclusively applicable to them. Now Veda Vyasa, killing Parimala, destroyed the Fifth Veda.

This is also an incredible legend which aimed at according a lofty origin and status to the Kammalas, the chief among the Left Hand caste people. They boasted that they were originally the descendants of Visvakarma, the divine architect and though they pursued the occupation of the goldsmiths, copper smiths and so on, they held fast to their legendary tradition.

Another story upholding the honoured position of the Kammalas was invented in the 11th century AD by the favoured caste who were accorded a place on the left side of the goddess Kali. In the town of Kanchipuram there were built separate halls for the Left and Right hand groups for offering worship in the Kamakshi temple at Kanchipuram. The Kammalas of Kanchipuram put forward in AD 1008 in proof of their high position certain copper plates which mentioned the special privileges to be enjoyed by the Kammalas. It is not known when these Plates were forged; but since they refer to a date corresponding to AD 1098. It may be conjectured that the appearance of the social division of Right and Left hand castes had emerged about the 11th century AD.

While the above-mentioned legends were invented in order to ennoble the history of the Left Hand castes there has appeared one which gives a high position to the Right Hand castes. It is found embodied in a manuscript entitled 'Valangai Jati Varalaru' or the history of the Valangai castes. The

manuscript is available in the Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras. It states that when the Pandyas and Cholas had become enfeebled in Tamil Nadu, one Paraiyan Nandan by name, usurped the power and become the ruler in the northern part of Tamil Nadu. In order to bestow upon himself a high social status he wanted to marry a girl of the Vellala caste. When this proposal was made to the leaders among the Vellalas, they could not openly refuse it. Therefore, they had recourse to a strategem with the connivance of the Kammalas of the place. The idea was to erect a pavilion of stone where the marriage ceremony was to be conducted and at the time of the wedding it should be so contrived that the pavilion falls on the bride and bridegroom. The stratagem was executed according to plan, and Nandan, the Pariah king, was killed. The surviving Pariahs of the locality were either driven out or enslaved by the Vellalas. The Pariahs attributed their miserable fate to the crafty strategem adopted by the Kammalas and therefore there arose an undying hostility between these two communities. The Pariahs were of the Right Hand Caste and the Kammalas were of the Left Hand Caste. On account of their renewed hostility the Paraiahs prevented the Kammalas from adopting any of their privileages like having white flags with the figure of a lion, swan, Hanuman and the plough. On the other hand, the Kammalas denied the Pariahs the privileges of having white, green or flowery umbrellas and of having torches during daytime.

This story is different from the others of its kind in so far as it does not specify the rise of the two divisions, the Right Hand and Left Hand castes. Further, the real opponents according to this story are the Pariahs and Vellalas and not the Pariahs and Kammalar. The artificial nature of the story is evident from giving a prominence to the part played by the Kammalas.

Again, the story of the ruler of a lower caste trying to marry into a higher caste and erection of a stone pavilion and its ultimate collapse through the stratgem of the Kammalas is told of several communities in Tamilaham. For example, the story of Nallatangal, current from time immemorial and of the Nanchikkuravan episode in Nanchinad may be mentioned in this connection. The stories are absolutely incredible.

Another tradition is that the Chola emperor Kulottunga III grew vexed with the disputes between the Vellalar and Kammalar in his dominion and asked them to appear before him in order that he might settle their dispute. It is stated that they came and that the Kammalar arrayed themselves on the left of the king and the Vellalar on the right. The king decided in favour of the superiority of the status of the Vellalas and they all went back to their places of residence. From that time onwards the Kammalas were called members of the Left Hand Caste and the Vellalas as of the Right Hand. This story is told of other castes as well, and it is not possible to

vouchsafe the credibility of the tradition. Moreover, it is generally believed that the Vellalas like Brahmins, were outside the pale of the division. How then can this story be accepted as true?

Another story is also current which seeks to explain the assignment of the Kammalas to the Left Hand group. It appears that a Kammalan's wife was unjustly killed by a king of Kanchipuram. The Kammala had two sons, one by his Kammala wife and another by a Balija wife. The two sons of the Kammala wreaked their vengeance on the king and killed him. When, however, it came to a division of the dead king's belongings between the two brothers, all the other castes participated and joined with one or the other of the Kammala and Balija brothers. Those with the Kammala brother were considered the members of the Left Hand caste and the others all of the Right Hand castes.

In Kanchipuram as well as in other towns of Tamil Nadu there were Right Hand and Left Hand temples, Mandapas and Dancing girls. The Left Hand people like Kammalas refrained from any association with their Right Hand counterparts. Disputes were common, and frequently unruly riots followed. Till the 19th century violent ruptures between the Right Hand and Left Hand factions were common. It is interesting to note that according to a legend the Kammalas were actively associated with the origin of the Right Hand-Left Hand faction. But it is not known how far this tradition is historically reliable.

A semi-historical account of the division of the Right Hand and Left Hand castes is found in the *Chola Purva Pattayam*, a copy of which is found in the Oriental Manuscripts Library at Madras. According to this, Karikala Chola, the king brought many Vellalas, Chettis and Kaikkolas from the overpopulated regions to other places like the Kongu country. This Karikala might be taken as identical with Kulottunga III, for that was one of his alternative names. An inscription of the 16th year of Kulottunga III as well as other inscriptions found at Kanchi[41] show that this ruler proceeded from Karur to Kongu in order to reorganize society there. In all probability he grouped the people on the basis of the Valangai and Idangai divisions. But, even so, these inscriptions do not furnish any indication of the origin of these two groups.

Apart from legends and semi-historical compositions there have been certain guesses advanced by some writers. T.N. Ellis, for instance, suggested[42] that the basic factor which accounted for the rise of the division of castes into Right Hand and Left Hand ones was based upon the age-long rivalry between the old agricultural population and the new industrial and manufacturing classes. The landowners and agriculturists constituted the Right Hand castes, while the manufacturers, industrialists and traders formed the Left Hand castes.

But there are certain obvious difficulties in accepting this explanation. It is well known that all

the agriculturists were not included in the Right Hand group. For instance, the Pallis and Pallas who were agriculturists were included among the Left Hand castes. Again, the Valangai (Right Hand) castes did not consist only of agriculturists and landowners. For instance, the Komatti Chettis and Beri Chettis who were mainly traders came under the category of Right Hand castes.

Further, the division into Right and Left Hand castes seems to have appeared before the 11th century AD, whereas the importation of industrialists is said to have taken place only in the 13th century. Further, it is not known who the new industrialists and manufacturers were that entered Tamilaham in the 13th century which led to the division of the people into the two categories. No doubt, some came on the wake of the Vijayanagar conquerors, but that was much later.

Another suggestion is that made by Gustav Oppert. He supports the view of Ellis and adds that the industrialists and manufacturers who entered southern India were mostly Jains, whereas the agriculturists were Hindus. Therefore, the religious factor is also imported in order to explain the social phenomenon. But this view too, is unacceptable. The Jains were in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu very much earlier than the 11th century AD. Further, the suggestion of Gustav Oppert ignores the identity of the castes included in the Left Hand group. For instance, the Pallis and the Pallas grouped under

the Left Hand castes were not Jains. The Kammalar were a prominent group of the Left Hand category and they could by no means be considered Jains. On the other hand, there were some in the Right hand who were Jains.

Yet another piece of guess is the one advanced by M. Srinivasa Iyengar. He thinks that the division of the people into the Right Hand and Left Hand castes originated in the Chola country about AD 1010. His diagnosis of the causes which led to this distinction is that political, social and religious factors were responsible for it. The hostility between the Cholas and the neighbouring kings was the political cause. The desire on the part of certain low castes to secure some privileges enjoyed by the higher classes was the social cause. He thinks that this bifurcation into the Right Hand and Left Hand castes was stimulated by the anti-Brahmanical views of Basava. But surely this is unacceptable, because Basava appeared considerably later than the time of the origin of the Right and Left Hand castes. Moreover, there is no evidence that Basava's teachings influenced the Tamil country. Finally, M. Srinivasa Iyengar states that the hostility between the Jains and Hindus was another cause. But it is difficult to understand how this could have accounted for the rise of the two categories of caste. Moreover, the Jains had become considerably weakened in the Tamil country after the 7th century AD.

In the consideration of the Right and Left Hand castes, it is significant to note, as observed earlier, that while the men of the Chakkiliya caste were included in the Idangai group, the women of the same caste were considered as belonging to the Right Hand category. The Chakkiliya women denied their husbands even conjugal rights till the fighting was over.[43] Similarly the men of the Palli caste were of the Left Hand section, while their women were of the Right Hand. These indicate that the division was artificial.

Though the real cause of the emergence of this artificial division of castes is not indubitably known, it is likely that one circumstance was responsible for its emergence. This was the recruitment of soldiers to the army by the Imperial Cholas. Traditionally men of certain castes were enrolled in the army. When later, the numerical strength of the fighting forces had to be increased, men of other castes also were admitted. The members of the traditional fighting castes came to be described as those of the Right and Left Hand castes, while those of the new recruits were known as the Left Hand castes. In this connection attention may be drawn to the fact that 14 Valangai regiments of the Cholas were described as 'Valangai Palam Padaigal'.[44]' This suggests that there were new regiments which were considered to belong to the Idangai. This is reinforced by the known facts that under the Imperial Cholas, Rajaraja I and Rajendra I, the soldiers

recruited from the vanquished powers were described as those of the Left Hand castes. Thus the Bedars of the Canarese country, the Pallans of the Pandyan kingdom, the Bedars, Madigar and the Chakkiliyans of the Kalinga region were, after their recruitment to the Chola army, considered as members of the Left Hand castes. As another example of the new immigrants having been assigned to the Left Hand caste, mention may be made of the people who migrated to and settled down in Parasurama Perunteruvu at Idalakkudi, near Nagercoil. Though they were not soldiers, they were outsiders. When they came to their new habitat, the Brahmins and Vellalas of the place assigned them to the Left Hand caste and were denied the right of temple entry. Again the Ilavas and Tiyas who came from Sri Lanka were treated as members of the Left Hand caste. In this connection it may be noted that there is a traditional saying that the Paraiyar of the Tamil country were not members of the Left Hand castes, but were Tamilar. This indicates that Idangaiyar were foreigners in the Tamil country. It is of significance that the original and the indigenous soldiers like the Vedan, Nattaman and Pariah castes were described as Velaikkarar, meaning soldiers.[45]

The connection between the designations of the army in terms of the Valangai and Idangai is evident from certain designations occurring in the Chola period. Thus in the time of the Imperial Cholas there was a regiment of soldiers known as

'Munrukaipadainar'.[46] More or less the same designation appears in another context. An inscription states that in the reign of Kulottunga I the protection of the property of Cheran Mahadevi Bhaktavatsalam temple was entrusted to 'Munram Padaiynar'.[47] The 'Munrukaippadainar' or 'Munrukai Mahasenai' were otherwise known as 'Munrukai Velaikkarar'. They denote obviously the army of the three divisions (kai).

In course of time, the division into Right and Left Hand castes spread among the various castes. But, as mentioned earlier, the Brahmins and Vellalas were generally considered to be outside the pale of this division; but in the time of the Imperial Cholas they also took sides occasionally.

Between the people of the Right Hand and Left Hand castes there were frequent disputes. These disputes figured prominently from the 11th to 18th century AD, and in particular from the 14th to the end of the 18th century. The earliest dispute about which we have epigraphic information is that of 1080 AD[48] or perhaps that of 1072 AD, at Rajamahendrachaturvedimangalam in the Tanjavur District.[49]

Frequently the disputes between the two classes arose on flimsy grounds. As a consequence of these feuds often bloodshed and confusion followed. Conflicts arose frequently on the exercise of social privileges and honours. For example, a conflict arose

in the 14th century between the Valangai and Idangai groups near Pondicherry over certain privileges like the use of white umbrellas, white horses, etc. Once a dispute arose simply fact that a chuckler (Chakkiliya) had dared to appear at a public from the ceremony with red flowers stuck in his turban, a privilege which the Pariahs alleged to belong exclusively to the Right Hand faction (Dubois : 3rd edition , p.27). The disputes are too many in number to be recorded. Conflicts between Pallas and Paraiyas were frequent. The Kammalas, as prominent among the Left Hand castes, were also involved in many disputes.

The tension between the Right Hand and Left Hand castes in the region of Tanjavur reached its height about AD 1440. This is learnt from an inscription[50] which speaks of a settlement between the two sections in Markal Nadu on the northern bank of the Kaveri. An agreement was eventually reached on the question of the various privileges to be enjoyed by the two sections. Taylor states that in 1438–39 an understanding among the various communities was arrived at, to the effect that if either the Right Hand or Left Hand section caused any trouble during public festivities, the said persons should forthwith be killed on the spot with spears without ceremony.[51]

An interesting conflict occured in AD 1700 between the barbers and the Chettis. The dispute

arose out of the right of wearing jasmine in their hair by barbers. The Chettis objected to it. On one occasion when the barbers were going round the tank near the temple of Channigaraya of Bhutamhalli wearing jasmine flowers in their hairs, one Chetti rushed and plucked away the flowers since they had no right to wear them. The barbers appealed to the Panchayat which agreed to consult the concerned inscription in the Nisakambha temple at Kanchi. It was found that the inscription has laid down that the right of wearing jasmine as also riding on horseback belonged to the Chettis and not to the barbers who are entitled to use only red ganagel flowers. The barbers decided to abide by the findings of the inscription.

The right to ride in a palanquin or horseback on the day of marriage and to have trumpet sounded before the bridegroom or having a flag of particular colour accompanied by music at public ceremonies were causes of serious conflicts. The Right Hand group insisted on priority in the distribution of *pansupari* and sandal at marriages and other social functions. The Right Hand castes had the privileges of employing Paraiya musicians with pipes and horns while the Let Hand castes could employ only Chakklis and drum beaters on important occasions.

Often, however, the two groups came to some understanding for the purpose of achieving certain common objects. For instance, an inscription of AD 1428 records[52] an agreement between the

Valangai and Idangai castes that they should not pay the taxes due to the king because they were oppressed by the royal officials as well as the landowners. We are not aware of the results of this no-tax campaign. Probably the king reprimanded his officials and appeased the Right and Left Hand castes.[53]

Again, another inscription of AD 1429 states that the Valangai and Idangai people assembled at a meeting in the temple and revised the dues to be collected from the tenants who had been oppressed by the government officials and the landlords.

In fact the taxes were heavy and both the Valangai and Idangai castes often united to bring down the taxes and even threatened to migrate to other places. A Vijayanagar inscription of AD 1446[54] confirms it. The king was obliged to reduce the taxes and recall the people.

In the relationship between the Right and Left Hand castes the Kammalas occupy a unique position. At times they claimed a position of equality with the Brahmins; they held that they were their own priests. The matter was taken to the court of law in 1814 and the Kammalas won a decree in their favour; the Kammalas could conduct marriages among the community with their own priests. The goldsmiths had special privileges like having double conches blown, drums beaten on auspicious

occasions and to put on shoes while going on a journey and to whitewash their houses.[55]

The Kammalas were worshippers of Kali and it has been suggested that they were descendants of the pre-Dravidian or aboriginal Naga tribes. From the times of yore, however, they had adopted the practice of burying the dead.

One inexplicable fact is that in Mysore the Kammalas were considered to belong to the Right Hand caste. In Kerala, where the Right and Left Hand castes had not appeared some of the Kammalar were treated as untouchables.

Thus the history of the Right Hand and Left Hand castes is interesting. The rivalry among the castes was strong between the 11th and the end of the 18th century. There was a dispute in the city of Madras as late as 1809. Gradually the rancour between the two groups disappeared. Beauchamp, the editor of the third edition of 'Hindu Manners and Customs and Ceremonies' by Abbe Dubois, says that 'these faction fights have gradually disappeared under the civilizing influences of education and good government.[56] He adds however that the distinctions between the two factions still exist in the outskirts of villages. It is surprising that the division into Right and Left hand castes existed even among the upper caste Christian converts. At Pondicherry it is considered that the Sacred Heart Church belonged to the Paraiahs and therefore were looked down

upon by certain Christians, because the latter belonged to the Left Hand group. In Karaikkal, too, there were frequent disputes between the Right and Left hand castes even in the 19th century. In 1828, for instance, an uprising took place at Karaikkal when the Kammalans were permitted by the Government to wear sandals.

5

CASTE GOVERNMENT

Matters concerning castes were regulated by caste councils. Often each subcaste had a council of its own. The caste panchayats, as these councils were called, kept a close watch on the activities of the individuals and regulated them. The village panchayats originated from the caste panchayats. Thus it was caste which was responsible for the development of an autonomous village organization with the panchayat as the pivot of its body politic. The caste councils exercised a strong influence on the panchayats of the village also.

The vast majority of caste matters were disposed of by the caste councils which exercised the final powers of expulsion from and restoration to caste as well as imposing fines and other penalties for less serious breaches of custom.

The caste council or caste panchayat can act only for a limited area. Panchayat literally denoted a body of five men, but in practice, it is usually

very much larger in strength. The officials who perform its executive functions, as well as sharing its judicial ones, may be appointed *ad hoc* or for a particular period or they may be hereditary. It has frequently been observed that the lower the caste in the social scale, the stronger its combination and the more efficient its organization.

The caste councils of the lower castes in the south are generally well organized. Among the Iluvans of Tirunelveli, for instance, each village had its own council which controlled a union of villages. Each group of them, five to seven Union Councils elected five members of the divisional council which regulated the affairs of the caste throughout the nadu or the large division of the country. The Panikkans in Tamil Nadu, likewise, had a similar, though not an identical system.

The headman of a caste council often had privileges or insignia which suggests that the position was derived in some cases from that of the chief of a tribe. In one section of the Vellalas of Tirunelveli, he had a seat on a dais, while every one else stands, and was addressed 'Irunkol' meaning 'please take your seat'. The powers of the headmen varied from place to place. But generally in the south, the 'headman is like a chief with practically absolute power,' according to O' Malley, and he has mentioned the Maravan caste as an instance.

In some castes, the headman enjoyed certain privileges. In one caste he was given a gold ring to wear and was humbly saluted with folded hands in the form of obeisance. In another caste he had the right to ride on horseback and to use an umbrella, before which any man of the caste coming before him prostrated himself.

The position of the headman was not only one of honour, but also of considerable authority. As a rule he did not act independently of the council, except in petty cases; but a man of wealth and influence might sometimes acquire a monopoly of power and acted like a dictator without the assistance or concurrence of any council. In some parts of Tamil Nadu and among some castes, the headman was like a chief with practically absolute power. Such is the case among the Maravans of Tamil Nadu, whose headman, besides deciding on cases of breaches of caste rules, had a peculiar duty due to the fact that the Maravans are a caste with criminal propensities. From them the village watchmen are drawn, on the principle either of setting a thief to catch a thief or of employing one as security against the misconduct of his fellows. The watchman's task was not merely to detect thefts but to prevent them; and if a theft occurred, the Maravans of the village had to make good the loss. Their headman then acted as an arbiter, for he apportioned the amount to be paid by each family as compensation to the victims of the theft. The system did not work too

well, for in order to compensate one householder the watchman himself committed theft of another's property or he gave a promissory note which he had no intention of redeeming.

The matters which came before the caste council were for the most part offences connected with marriage and morals, food and drink. The caste councils further dealt with religious offences, such as the omission of performance of rites at ceremonies like marriages and funerals and killing or causing the death of sacred animals and birds.

Generally speaking, the offences of which a caste panchayat took cognizance were of the following kinds: (1) Offences against the commensal taboos which prevent members of the caste from eating, drinking or smoking with members of another caste (2) Offences involving sex or breaches of the marriage rules of the caste, widow-remarriages in the case of castes which do not permit them and (3) Grave offences against widely accepted precepts of Hinduism, such as insulting a Brahmin or killing a cow, beating a man with shoe, etc.

Not every little matter comes before the caste councils. The headman and elders often settle disputes out of court, effect compromises and reprimand petty offenders without the formality of a trial. The procedure observed in cases tried by caste panchayats was extremely simple, informal and untrammelled by the law of evidence. Evidence

before a caste panchayat was frequently given on oath, and for Hindu oaths, Ganges water or the sacred *tulasi* plant or holding a cow's tail were commonly adopted.

The procedure adopted in trying the charges against an accused person was simple. After the charge was stated, the accused was questioned. If he admitted his guilt, sentence followed. If he denied the charges, witnesses were heard in support of the accusation and in defence of the accused after which came the verdict.

In backward areas sometimes trial by ordeal was adopted. The accused was required to put a hand into boiling oil or to carry in his hand a piece of red hot metal.

The punishments decreed by the Caste council were often serious. The offender was outcasted or fined or subjected to corporal punishment; sometimes he was kicked by every member of the council; at others he was bound hand and foot or tied up in a mat for some hours.

The most familiar punishment imposed by caste panchayats was that which deprived a casteman of the right to receive water or the tobacco pipe from the hands of his caste fellowmen, or forbade them likewise to receive it from him. He was debarred from having the services of the Brahmins who conducted ceremonies for his caste, nor of the

barbers who shaved its members nor of the washerman who washed their clothes; and if he died under the ban his corpse would be denied formal funeral rites. An excommunication of this sort may be for a temporary period or for an indefinite time, depending on the case and the judgment. Other forms of punishment are the exaction of fines or feasts to the caste or to Brahmins. Still other penalties might be corporal punishment or the performance of a pilgrimage or the collection of a fine by begging. Many penalties imposed were intended to humiliate the culprit excessively, e.g. corporal punishment might be given with a shoe for the sake of humiliating the offender. The person responsible for the death of a cow often had to make a pilgrimage with a cow's tail tied to his staff or beg for his living for a period in the same manner, or accompanied by a cow the tail of which he holds or he might have to bellow (howl) like an ox at the same time or even to wear the dead animal's hide, horns and hoofs, or have a rope round his neck and straw in the mouth. Shaving the culprit on one side of this head and face and leaving the other adorned with hair was another form of humiliation, or the victim is paraded on a donkey with one side of his face blacked and the other whitened. In other cases he might be compelled to wear a string of old shoes round his neck, while an unchaste woman might have to walk round the village with a basket of mud on her head or with a grindstone hung round her neck. O' Malley mentions as a punishment

making a man stand on one leg in the sun with a pitcher of water balanced on the head.

The culprit was compelled to ride on a donkey with one half of his face coated with lime and the other half smeared with tar. A milder punishment was to make a man stand for a certain length of time in the sun with pitcher full of water posed on his head, sometimes to make him stand on one leg with the pitcher of water or he might have the heavy mortar which is used for pounding rice hung from his neck. Women might be punished for sexual misconduct by having to walk round the village with a grinding stone round their necks.

Punishments imposed by some castes in the Tamil Nadu were extraordinary. Among the Valaiyans an unchaste woman had to carry a basket of mud round the village, and men who are habitual offenders against morality were forced to sit on the ground with their toes tied to their necks. In some cases the offenders were out-casted; then, after proper expiation, they were readmitted.

In some cases (not only in North India, but in South India as well) bathing in the Ganges or even swallowing some of its sand (or mud) very often formed part of penalty imposed, as did drinking water into which a Brahmin had dipped his toe. Here the element of purification was clearly present. Blunt (in his Caste System) records some two dozen varied punishments, specific castes (in North India) inflicted by the Panchayats of various castes.

For expiation, a simple method was taking *panchagavya*, the five products of the cow, a mixture of milk, curd, ghee, cowdung and cow's urine. Sometimes the purification was very elaborate. Among the *Urali* of Tiruchirappalli, if a man had seduced a girl of the caste, they had to be married and they and their relatives purified by bathing in 108 different pools of water, by walking over a hundred heads of sheep with the blood of which they were smeared, by further bathing, by drinking a cow's urine, by bathing again and finally by feasting the panchayat. Among the Uppiliyans of Tiruchirappalli, an offender called 'the man of two lights' had to eat a meal in the polluted house with his hands tied behind his back.

Purification and expiation were followed by the readmission to ordinary communion of the erring casteman, but expulsion for life might be the penalty for heinous offence. In Kerala, if a Nambudiri woman committed adultery, she was outcasted and a funeral ceremony was performed for her as if she were dead; if a husband takes back an erring wife or a father receives home an erring daughter, they, too, were liable to be outcasted.

CASTE GOVERNMENT

There is a saying in North India meaning 'the caste is its own ruler.' It is based on fact, for, each caste

was a self-governing community. It regulated its affairs and enforced its unwritten law independently of others and generally enjoyed freedom from outside control including that of Brahmins.

The caste was the custodian of its own laws. It punishes those who offended against them. For the purposes of self-government, the lower castes were far better organized than the higher, which rarely have any machinery for the regulation of their affairs. The lower castes on the other hand have, as a rule, a very effective organization for making and enforcing their decrees. Caste government among them was implemented by governing bodies and headmen to whom authority was delegated.

CASTE COUNCILS

The constitution of the governing body varied. Sometimes it was a general assembly of the adult members of the caste. Sometimes it was a council, composed of heads of houses or of representatives of families, who held office by hereditary right or by appointment for life; in the latter case, the members of the caste elected members to vacancies as they occurred. A special council might be constituted *ad hoc* for the settlement of some particular question or the adjudication of a special case after the decision of which its power lapsed.

The commonest kind of caste council was that which consisted of the elder men of the caste. This formed a kind of standing committee under the presidentship of a headman. In the field of offenders against caste rules its members acted like a jury with the headman as a presiding judge; in matters of common interest to the caste it was like the directorate of a company. It tended to promote discipline among its members; but for matters of grave and general importance, it might give place to a general assembly of the male members of the caste; even then the members of the council guide the discussion and have a large voice in the final decision.

The governing body was generally known as a *panchayat*, however, there is no fixation of members to five; the name panchayat is only a traditional one. There is a popular saying which means 'The voice of the *panchayat* is the voice of God'.

It must not be imagined that a whole caste was governed by one council. On the contrary, there were different councils for different sections of a caste, because only those who could intermarry could have a common council.

Questions of marriage customs and breaches of the marriage law were the most important matters coming within the purview of the caste council; and each subcaste administered its own marriage law. Communal feasts were a common feature of

caste government; when a general meeting was held, a feast was the finale.

Besides subcaste meetings, there were general caste meetings and different caste councils also occasionally combined when there was any grave matter of interest to decide upon.

Not uncommonly also there was a regular gradation of caste councils, those constituted for a small area being subordinate to others which controlled a large area. When this was the case, there was often a well-defined representative system, the superior councils being elected by those below them and settling questions beyond the competence of the latter. Among the Ilavans of Tirunelveli each village had its own council and elected two representatives to a council which controlled a union of villages. Each group of five to seven union councils elected five members to a divisional council, which exercised authority over the nadu. In the same way, among the Panikkans of (Madras) Tamil Nadu, eleven villages formed a union, on the council of which each village had a representative, and eleven unions formed a *nadu* and elected the members of its council.

The Executive consisted of two or three office-bearers. By far the most important was the headman, who presided at meetings of the caste council and had the authority which his designation implied. Next in rank was a man who presided over meetings

in the absence of the headman. The third functionary was a subordinate, a kind of beadle (தண்டல்காரன்) who acted as the headman's messenger, summoned meetings and collected the fines imposed by the Council. In some cases these offices were held for life, and when an incumbent died, the men of the caste elected his successor. More generally they were hereditary; if one of them devolved on a minor or a totally incompetent person, another member of his family might act in his place.

As with the councils, so with the headman, there were in some areas and among some castes gradations of jurisdiction. In the Tiruchirappali District, for example, there were superior headmen who had authority over a number of groups of villages, each of which had its own headman. They acted as an appellate or revisional authority, if the local councils were unable to come to a decision, or if their decisions were disputed.

The Councils themselves did a good deal of non-judical work. They arranged for the partition of property among members of families which had decided to separate, enforced both the fulfilment of promises of marriage and the restoration of runaway wives and determined the maintenance to be given to divorced women; the last was a rare contingency.

There is no doubt that the caste councils exercised a close control over the members of their

community and kept up a fair measure of strict discipline. Relations with the suspects in moral were at once cut off, and they were boycotted until they cleared themselves out of the charges. This was specially the case in the villages and among the lower castes. The lower the caste, the stricter it was in enforcing caste rules and preserving the honour of the caste.

It has been observed that in India the spirit of combination is always in the inverse ratio to the rank of a class, weakest in the highest and strongest in the lowest class. This is certainly true of the Tamil castes; the high castes seldom have any organization such as is found among the lower castes. There is rarely anyone with authority to take the initiative in case of complaints, or any governing body to take offenders to task or try them and pass judgment on them.

DECLINE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE CASTE COUNCILS

The regulation of the affairs of caste by councils is almost a thing of the past. The law courts have had a considerable influence on the system of caste government. This influence has greatly increased by now.

Moreover, during the past few centuries, men of wealth and position have been often able to

defy those who sought to ostracize them. They enlisted friends and sympathizers and a caste was not infrequently split by faction as in a case[57] in which a man, who had been excommunicated for a voyage overseas, gathered a party round him and formed a society which excommunicated his excommunicators.

Moreover, with the advance of Western education a spirit of defiance of the age-old regulations of caste appeared. The highly educated members of the high castes themselves appreciate the liberty which they enjoy by not being in tutelage to any central authority. At a Conference which one advanced community held in Bombay some decades ago, a proposal to revive caste panchayats or councils met with determined opposition. It was maintained that individual liberty and scope for development were essentials to progress and the revival of the authority of the councils was denounced as the greatest of evils.[58]

Now, in towns and cities, caste councils have practically ceased to exist. Even in villages there is no regular session of caste councils. In the event of any extraordinary occurrence, a caste council or village panchayat may be summoned to offer solutions for the difficult problem that arises.

6

MODERN TENDENCIES

The Caste Council is an institution of the past. Even where it survives it has little executive power. The decline of the caste council commenced with the increased growth of a centralised administrative system in India by the British. The establishment of courts of law at various levels tended to cripple the time-honoured caste councils.

Some individual instances have been recorded of British officers in Madras setting aside the authority of caste councils beginning from the early years of the 19th century. In Coimbatore, a Major Macleod superseded hereditary headmen and ordered that cases of caste offences should be heard by a tahsildar, assisted by an assembly of the most respectable men of the castes concerned. The tahsildar, after consulting the assembly regarding the customs of the castes, concerned, passed the sentence. Any one who refused to submit to the decision of the tahsildar and the assembly was immediately banished from the district.

Another officer in Coimbatore, finding that the headman of a certain caste exercised his authority unjustly similarly ordered all caste questions to be settled in the public court by a tahsildar with the advice of a caste council to the satisfaction of all concerned.[59]

Besides the growing authority of the British government, there appeared other forces which tended to disintegrate the caste influences. From the beginning of the present century nationalism appeared as a force in politics. Though it did not influence the common man in the early stages the ideal of nationalism influencing the leaders of the country operated as a force weakening the hold of the caste system. Several leaders in Tamil Nadu and outside emphasised the influence of caste in operating against nationalism.

In particular this feeling influenced the educated youths even of the higher castes. Moreover, caste was attacked by the advanced people as an obstacle to liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Meanwhile, certain movements which appeared in South India aimed at attacking the position of superiority enjoyed by the brahmins over the centuries. The Lingayats as a powerful group working against the Brahmins became influential in Bombay and Karnataka. In Madras during the first quarter of the present century there appeared the Justice Party which aimed at crushing the monopoly

enjoyed by the Brahmins in Government service and in the field of education. 'Equal opportunities for all and injustice to none' were the watchwords of the Justice Party. Whether the ideal was fulfilled in every case is doubtful. But it tended to awaken the feelings of the non-Brahmin castes in the cities and towns.

Later in the century there appeared an extreme, movement against Brahmin supremacy and domination of certain castes in the name of religion. This was known as the Self Respect Movement. It demanded the abandonment of caste bigotry and intellectual arrogance. In fact, it was the forerunner of the revolutionary 'Dravida Kazhagam' organized by its leader, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker. The ramparts of the age-old caste system were assailed not only by the above-mentioned movements but also by certain other forces which affected the everyday life of the people.

The increase of railways and buses inevitably brought people closer and tended to break down the cause exclusiveness and angularities of the orthodox people. Industrial progress and the growth of factories were potent forces in towns operating against caste segregation and exclusiveness.

The spread of education not only brought pupils of different castes together but promoted among the products of higher education the irrationality of caste arrogance. This, supported by the stress laid

by national leaders, had an effect. But the results of these should by no means be exaggerated. India, including Tamil Nadu, is pre-eminently rural and old customs die hard in the proverbially conservative villages. To the ordinary Hindu the village is his world. In particular the influence of the womenfolk in the villages should not be underrated. It has been rightly said that the grandmother, whose influence is especially great, stands for the maintenance of orthodox tradition and age-old ceremonies. Referring to her power and conservatism, Lord Curzon is said to have made the shrewd remark that what India needs is a new grandmother. Things are now changing; particularly the change is conspicuous in towns and cities.

Among forces working towards caste integration mention must be made of the attempts at social climbing adopted by several castes. Some castes and sub-castes abandoned their old traditional customs and adopted those of the higher castes. For instance, widow remarriages and child marriages were given up by people of certain castes who had adopted them for ages.

Certain irrational restrictions and disabilities which had been imposed on the lower castes provoked the wrath of not only their own people but of some advanced sections among the higher castes as well. For instance, regarding the construction of houses with upper storeys there were restrictions. Members of many lower castes were forbidden to cover the

upper part of their body except the waist.[60] In the case of women also, until 1865, they were obliged by law to go with the upper part of their bodies quite bare, if they belonged to the Ilavan, Paraiya or other castes.[61]

Protest against caste arrogance and monopoly gathered momentum. The agitation was no doubt slow but it began in the latter part of the 19th century and became increasingly popular.

The employment of priests for household sacrifices witnessed a change from the old practices. Certain non-brahmin communities began to employ non-brahmin priests in connection with household ceremonies. What is more significant is that in respect of certain temples where Brahmins alone were priests for a long time, decrees were obtained from High Courts that the monopoly need not be continued. These had a profound psychological effect. In many temples of Tamil Nadu, too, Brahmins were dislodged from the priesthood. Very recently in Tamil Nadu it was decreed by the Government that non-brahmins can also be priests. Those who have enjoyed the hereditary right of priesthood for ages protested, but the Tamil Nadu Government has in 1974 appealed to the Union Government to grant them freedom in the matter.

Meanwhile, from about the middle of the last century certain pieces of legislation have been enacted by the Central Government which have

tended to break certain unwholesome customs based on caste traditions. The most important of these was the *Caste Disabilities Removal Act* of 1850 which dealt a decisive blow at the integrity of caste. The Act provides that a person does not forfeit his ordinary rights of property by loss of caste or change of religion. Though simple in nature, the Act has had vital implications.

Following this came the law regarding inter-caste marriage. In respect of this the decisions given by the Courts have varied. In some cases it was held that marriages between persons belonging to different divisions of the Brahmins or the Sudras were invalid unless specially sanctioned by custom; but recent decisions decree otherwise. In a Madras case, when a Hindu married a Christian woman turned into a Hindu, the marriage was accepted as one between members of different divisions of the Sudra class and therefore valid. Integrity of caste was thus recognized as valid.

But much more had to be done before the legal position regarding intermarriage was improved. Social reformers were not satisfied with the existing state of affairs, and legislators tried to introduce bills legalizing intercaste marriages. The *Special Marriage Act* of 1972 made intercaste marriages valid, provided the parties registered the contract of marriage, declaring *inter alia* that they did not belong to any religion. The clause requiring the renunciation of caste and religion for the purpose

of intermarriage was naturally considered a hardship. Consequently there was continued agitation. It was only in the Reformed Legislature that Sir Hari Sing Gour succeeded in getting his *Special Marriage Amendment Act* of 1923 passed. By this, it was not obligatory for persons marrying under the provisions of this Act to make the declaration prescribed in the Act of 1872. But still there were some drawbacks. Adoption by the married couple under this provision was not recognized. Moreover, those who were married under this provision would cease to be members of the joint family to which they previously belonged. By and large marriage within the caste continues. The sanction of age-long custom is the difficult barrier against intermarriage. Educated social reformers must advocate the effective adoption of intercaste marriage.

There is no denying the fact that several changes have occured in modern times to weaken the rigours of caste on Hindu society. The establishment of a centralised government, the influence of Western education, industrialisation and urbanisation, travel and mobility, the crusade against caste by enlightened social workers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, the influences of Arya Samaj and other reform movements, the result of the activities and teachings of Christian missionaries and above all, the Government's earnest efforts to abolish untouchability and elevate the depressed classes have all cumulatively tended to weaken the rigours of the orthodox caste system.

But we are yet far away from the stage when caste has lost its influence. There is a marked difference between what is seen at the outer surface and what is operative deeper in society. The caste feeling of animosity and rivalry is still in force though it is very subdued and covered by an air of cordiality and brotherhood.

The vitality of caste is very much in evidence at each decennial census. At that time the castes put up all claim to greatness and glorious traditions. Hundreds of petitions and memorials are received by the Government demanding that the different castes shall be recorded under new-fangled honorific names or shall be recognized as Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas or shall be given a rank in an imaginary warrant of precedence.

It is mysterious that Mahatma Gandhi who fought tooth and nail against untouchability was intent upon the continuance of Varnashram Dharma. True, he quoted chapter and verse in support of this view, but to the present-day youth it is inexplicable and irrational.

What is happening in independent India may appear justifiable in one sense, but in actuality it works havoc by encouraging the perpetuation of caste denomination. The provisions of constitutional safeguards to the backward sections of the population, especially the Scheduled castes and tribes, have given a new lease of life to caste. It is

significant that this contrasts with the aim of bringing about a casteless society which most political parties including the Congress, profess to be the avowed ideal.

Provision of educational concessions and scholarships and special considerations in the matter of recruitment to Government service are good in themselves and are in the nature of providing historic justice. But do not those things contribute to the perpetuation, if not strengthening of caste differences? Those who aim at the ushering in of a casteless society must weigh the pros and cons of the present policy and adopt a statesmanlike pattern.

Most abominable is the provision of new colonies and house-sites for Harijans or for separate classes of people. It need hardly be mentioned that it is a short-sighted, though popular policy.

One important feature in the aspiration of caste-ridden people deserves to be noticed. Although the lower castes struggle to ascend the social ladder, they are individually insistent that those below them should not rise higher. There is often a lamentable measure of hypocrisy in caste matters even among the educated people. Many condemn caste only in public.

7

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

The most abominable feature of the Indian caste system is the position accorded to the low castes. They have been described by various names such as Untouchables, Unapproachables, Depressed Classes, Adi Dravidas, Panchamas, Scheduled Castes and so on. Harijan is the glorified term coined by Gandhiji in 1933 for describing the total body of Depressed Classes. The term 'Scheduled Castes' is the expression standardised in the 'Constitution of the Republic of India', though this name was first coined by the Simon Commission.

People of the ancient tribes living generally in the outskirts of the plains, more often in hills and wooded regions, were described as the Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Tribes were occupying in some respects a better position than the Scheduled Castes: they were not subjected to the evils of untouchability and unseeability to the extent that the Scheduled Castes were subjected. One reason

for this circumstance was that they lived outside the villages and towns which were regions of caste-culture. No doubt the Scheduled Tribes also were subjected to economic and sex exploitation; but on the whole their position was not so despicable as that of the Scheduled Castes.

In respect of population according to the Census of 1961, the percentage of the Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu was 18.7 in relation to the total population of the State. A concentration of Scheduled Castes is found in the Districts of South Arcot, Tanjavur, North Arcot and Chingleput, forming 46% of the total Scheduled Caste population in the State.

The Scheduled Tribes are largely concentrated in the Nilgiris District where according to the Census of 1961, 3.16% of the population belongs to the Scheduled Tribes. Besides the Kota, the other Scheduled Tribes inhabiting the district of the Nilgiris include the Toda, the Kurumba, the Paniya, the Irula, the Kattu Naicka and the Sholega. Of these the Kota, the Toda and the Kurumba, who claim to be the autochthons of the regions where they live, are the only tribes found exclusively in the Nilgiris District. Besides these, in the Nilgiris District there live the Badaga who constitute the largest single community. Outside the Nilgiris, the Scheduled Tribes are found in the Salem, North Arcot and Coimbatore Districts of Tamil Nadu.

According to the 1971 Census the total population in Tamil Nadu is 412 lakhs of whom

73.13 lakhs belong to the Scheduled Castes and 3.30 lakhs to the Scheduled Tribes. A large number of farm labourers in the Tanjavur District belongs to the Scheduled Castes.

ORIGIN

It is difficult to determine when untouchability made its appearance for the first time. There is no evidence that it existed in the pre-Vedic age. In fact, in the Varna scheme of social order in the Vedas, mention is made only of the four castes and the Untouchables do not find a place in them. There are no references in Vedic literature to groups such as the Ayogava, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasa who were outside the four castes and were held in contempt. It is not known when these denominations emerged. Probably in the age subsequent to the Brahmanas, these distinctions appeared. The Pancavinca Brahmana does not show any indication that untouchability had arisen by the time when it was composed; if it were so, the washing of the feet of the Brahmins could not have been a duty of the Sudra. The origin of untouchability has not been studied systematically. Writers like Muir, Hopkins and Fick have not investigated the question.

It is probable that the origin of the position of depressed classes if partly racial, partly religious and partly a matter of custom which emerged in the post-Brahmana period. A suggestion has been

made that the origin of untouchability may be traced to the practice of pollution of women.[62] Pollution would appear to have been observed first in connection with menstruation. Death was another factor which prompted the observance of pollution. These were strange and unaccountable occurrences, and perhaps out of fear or out of the inexplicable nature of the phenomena, pollution was observed. When menstruation occured, the primitive people, out of fright, might have put her away in a secluded part of the house.

It has been pointed out by G. K. Pillai that the name, given in Malayalam to menses is significant, for it is 'purattumaral' or shifting her to a place outside (the house) or it is 'Tindari' meaning unapproachability. But Malayalam as an independent language had its origin only about the 9th century AD., though 'Tindari', the Tamil word, might have connoted the same idea from an early date. The word 'pula' from which pollution or its Latin root 'Pollus' may have been derived, denotes in Tamil and Malayalam, a kind of social ostracism during the period of impurity after the death of a relative. It is not unlikely that the term 'Pulayan' referring to a person of a particular low caste in Tamil and Malayalam is derived from 'Pula'.

As mentioned earlier, it is probable that the idea of untouchability commenced from the time when notions of ceremonial purity gradually began to appear in the age subsequent to that of the

Brahmanas and the epoch of the later Vedas. The *Panchavimsa Brahmana* states that a person about to perform a sacrifice should not address a Sudra. It adds further that a Sudra should not be allowed to be present in the hall where a sacrifice was being offered and that the milk to be used for a fire oblation should not have been milked by a Sudra. Thus it appears that the idea of impurity of the Sudra appeared in the period of the Brahamans and the conception of untouchability must have appeared some time after the age of the Brahamans.

In the Taittariya Brahmana, prohibitions are laid down to be observed for a whole year prior to the performance of sacrifices. This shows that ideas of ceremonial purity began to appear in the Taittariya Brahmana. For the sacrifice, milk was not to be brought by the Sudra. It is notable that food after sacrifice was not to be offered to the Chandala.

The question arises as to who are the Untouchables, or in other words, what are the characteristics which mark them out from the rest of the Hindus. The tests of the Depressed Classes for 'Avarnas' 'Untouchables' or 'External Castes', or later called Harijans, are the following:

1. Whether the caste can be served by clean Brahmins or not.
2. Whether it can be served by barbers, water carriers, tailors and such others who serve the caste Hindus.

3. Whether the caste pollutes a high-caste Hindu by contact or by proximity.
4. Whether a caste Hindu can take water from that caste.
5. Whether debarred from public conveniences such as roads, ferries, wells or schools.
6. Whether debarred from the use of Hindu temples.
7. Whether an educated man of the caste will be treated as an equal by the educated caste Hindu.
8. Whether the caste is merely depressed on account of its own ignorance, illiteracy or poverty, and but for that, would be subject to no social disability.
9. Whether it is depressed only on account of the occupation followed.

But several of these tests involve unknown or indeterminable factors, as for example, who is a clean Brahmin? What constitutes pollution and so on.

The Dharmasastras declare the Chandalas to be the progeny of unions between a Brahmin female and a Sudra male. The age of the Dharmasastras is difficult to be determined. But from the available evidence it may be held that the 6th and 5th centuries BC formed the period of the Dharmasastras. Thus ideas about the Chandala and ceremonial purity might have appeared before 500 BC.

References to pratiloma castes appear in the *Arthasastra* as well as in Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* of about 150 BC. Manu develops the idea of the degradation of the Chandalas. He states that the Chandalas were to reside only outside the villages and were subject to various inhibitions. They were not allowed to use gold or silver ornaments nor wear cotton, much less silk clothing. The use of skin or corpses alone was permitted for them. The duty assigned to the Chandalas was to serve as hangmen and as undertakers for unclaimed corpses.

By the 2nd century BC, it appears that the classes of people called the Chandalas, Svapachas and Mritapa, who were all of mixed caste and thus below the rank of Sudras had slowly deteriorated in their social position between the time of Panini (6th century BC) and that of Manu (c. 4th century AD). In the South the Paraiyan carried on scavenging, while leather working had become the traditional occupation of Madiga and the Chakkiliyan in the South by the early centuries of the Christian era.

Dr. Ambedkar held that the practice of untouchability began in the Gupta period, around the 6th century AD. The basis on which he formulates this conclusion is not clear. In fact, it would seem that the demon of untouchability began to appear earlier, surely sometime earlier than 4th century AD. In Tamil Nadu, untouchability or the degradation of the lowest castes must have appeared in the Sangam age itself, i.e., before the 3rd century AD. There are

pieces of evidence savouring of the practice of untouchability in the Purananuru[63] and other early works of Tamil literature. The lowest class are known as Kadaisiyar, particularly referring to women of the last category.

However, there is no doubt that untouchability was the logical end of casteism. Subjective prejudices deepened the illwill towards the lower castes and that is the reason why the Sudra castes excelled the Brahmins and others in observing caste apartheid towards the untouchables.

In Tamil Nadu, the demon of untouchability became increasingly dominant in the Pallava, Chola and later periods. There was an ever-growing adoption of untouchability and unapproachability all through the succeeding epochs, right down to the present time. In fact, the disabilities which were imposed on the depressed classes and on the untouchables assumed abominable forms with the lapse of time. For centuries, Hindus have been taught that the lowest among them have been born to serve their betters and that, to aspire to the rightful privileges of another caste is to sin against the basic tenet of their religion.

As a consequence, various kinds of disabilities and harassments were imposed on the lower sections of the community. The disabilities varied to some extent from region to region and from subcaste to subcaste among the lower groups. Apart from the

social tradition, the economic position of the lower classes contributed to their misery and suffering at the hands of the higher classes. Most rural untouchables were landless. This was the prime factor in perpetuating the miserable plight of the untouchables.

In many villages the untouchables were for ages forbidden from using public roads at the same time as caste Hindus. Certain invidious distinctions appeared, as for instance, the prevention of certain classes of barbers from cropping the hair or shaving the faces of untouchables. Washerman, too, did not ordinarily serve the Harijans.

The Scheduled Castes whose numerical strength is equal to that of the Muslims were until recently the most persecuted people in India. The village where the low classes lived in large numbers witnessed the most barbarous condition. Even when the depressed classes were admitted to schools, they were not allowed to sit on the same benches. As recently as 18-11-1972 there appeared a report in the Madras Mail that Harijans could not take water from common wells. This was a serious grievance.

The Harijans were subjected to humiliation and not infrequently to the barbarous violence at the hands of the higher sections. Reports were received from places in North India of villagers sacrificing a Harijan child to appease an angry God of a Harijan being thrown into a well or burnt alive, of Harijan

women being raped by gangs and of their houses being destroyed.

It is too well known that they were denied entry into temples and all sacred places. Perhaps that was the reason why the lower classes resorted to the worship at the shrines of Madan and Isakki which were located in the outskirts of the village.

V.B. Kulkarni, writing in the Indian Express of August 22, 1973, stated that 'not a day passes without reports about the persecution of Harijans including physical assaults, murder, looting and burning of their property.'

Among other disabilities suffered by the lower classes was the restriction on the covering of the bosom with clothing. Presumably the genesis of this barbarous prohibition was to make it easy for recognition and avoidance of the lower castes by the high caste people. There were, as mentioned earlier, restrictions on the use of ornaments. Gold could be used only by the higher castes, while silver was allowed for some of the lower castes. The bulk of the depressed classes and Hill people had to be content with brass ornaments and beads.

For the use of certain lamps, particular kinds of music, conveyances, etc. special permission had to be obtained, which was very often refused for the lowest classes.

The people of the higher castes were not affording scope for the education of the depressed classes. As Rowe, in his book, 'Every day life in India' writes: 'The very essence of caste lies in the degradation of others'. This was seen in restricting the scope of education to the lower classes. The above-mentioned writer states further in his book: 'So fiercely are the higher castes opposed not only to associating with low-caste pupils, but to their being educated at all, that it is with the greatest difficulty we can obtain sites for Christian schools in the villages, if the high caste people can throw their impediments in our way'.[64]

It is notable that so late as 1930 the disabilities of the depressed classes were enforced and enlarged in Tamil Nadu. In December 1930 the Kallar in Ramananthapuram propounded eight prohibitions, the disregard of which led to the violence by the Kallar who furiously set fire to the huts and destroyed the properties of the depressed classes (Adi-Dravidas) for disregarding the prohibitions. These eight prohibitions were :

1. that the Adi-Dravidas shall not wear any ornament of gold or silver.
2. that the males should not be allowed to wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips.
3. males not to wear coats, shirts or banians.
4. nor were they to have their hair cropped.

5. only earthenware vessels were to be used.
6. women were not to cover the upper portion of their bodies with jackets and upper cloth.
7. nor were they allowed to use flowers or saffron paste.
8. the people, obviously the males, were not to use umbrellas or sandals.

In 1931, the Kallar, not satisfied with the above eight restrictions, drew up a list of eleven prohibitions. These included that the Adi-Dravidas (1) should not read or get educated (2) should be asked to tend the cattle of the Mirasdars or landowners and plough their land and (3) must work as coolies only and not to own lands.

It is commonly thought that the Brahmins are responsible for the abuses of the caste system. But it is not so. True, they laid the foundation of the caste complex and paved the way for casteism. But in later times the caste Hindu non-Brahmins were the people who extended them to. the extreme limit. For example, several subdivisions among Mudaliars like Arcot, Tondaimandala, Tuluva and Ponneri appeared. There are numerous categories of Pillais.

Several public hotels refused admission for the Depressed classes. A resolution of the anti-Untouchability Conference of 1919 in Madras regretted to note that in Restaurants, Coffee Hotels,

Hair-dressing Saloons, water-pandals, etc., notices are hung prominently excluding the 'Untouchables'

It is notable that one class of people was not to be seen by the caste Hindus. These were the washermen of the untouchables of Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts. The practice was in vogue till at least 1931. These prohibited washermen were called 'Porada Vannar'.

One class of untouchables adopted the repugnant practice of carrying nightsoil on the head. In Karnataka in 1973, under the pressure from the Minister, B. Basavalingappa, an acknowledged Harijan leader, the Karnataka Government ordered the revolutionary but humane step of abolishing the system of carrying nightsoil on their heads by the Harijans. It is significant to note that as a result of this bold action and as a consequence of his atheistic preachings, Basavalingappa was compelled to resign from the Cabinet. It must be recalled that Gandhiji was against this inhuman degradation of Harijans carrying nightsoil on their heads.

Unapproachability was common in Kerala and it had its influence in parts of Tamil Nadu as well. Till the beginning of the present century these were rampant. Sir Herbet Risley quotes the Cochin Census Report: "A Nair can pollute a man of a higher caste, only by touching him, while people of the Kammala group including masons, blacksmiths, carpenters and workers in leather pollute at a distance of 24 feet,

and toddy drawers (*Ilavan* or Tiyan) at a distance of 36 feet; for Pulayas and Pariahs who eat beef, the range of pollution is stated to be not less than 64 feet."[65]

Rivers in his book 'Social Organization' mentions that in Malabar 'a Nayar may not approach within six paces of a Nambudiri Brahmin, a man of the Barber caste not within twelve paces, a carpenter or goldsmith not within twenty four. For a Tiyan, the limit was a distance of thirty-six and for a Pulayan, ninety-six paces.[66]

If a Pulayan touched a Brahmin, the latter must make expiation by immediately bathing and reading some sacred books and changing his Brahmanical thread. Others like the Nayars should bathe and should particularly cleanse the places of the body touched by untouchables and Europeans with cowdung water. Things should be placed down at a distance and not actually given to the high caste men. True, these conditions are adopted in Kerala; but they had their influence more or less in the neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Particularly in respect of Nanchinad, which was for a long time under the rule of the Travancore kings, but which is now in Tamil Nadu, the inhibitions associated with caste were more or less similar to those in Kerala.

Each caste was familiar with the prescribed distances within which they may approach or be approached by every other caste in the whole scale.

Each caste had its own distinctive style of dress and ornaments, forbidden by law and custom to others.

The low caste people were not permitted to enter any public market. Hence they experienced great disadvantages in selling any little produce they happened to possess. Nor could they enter a shop.

Moreover, the Courts of Justice and Government Offices were mostly near temples. So persons of the low caste could not have access to them; they had to wait in the sun and rain for a number of days before the official came out and enquired.

The low caste people were not permitted to build their houses near the road side. Their dwellings were miserable huts made of sticks, with walls of mud or instead of walls, curtains made of coconut leaves and thatched with grass or coconut leaves far outside the main temples.

Little wonder that Dr. Ambedkar, the famous Harijan leader, was stung to the quick and deplored the social inequality that has prevailed for ages. While presenting the draft of the Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, he rightly observed : "On January 26, 1950, we have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."

Untouchability is the logical end of caste apartheid. Ambedkar's exposition of the origin, nature and effects of untouchability constitutes a classic on the subject. He has pointed out how the Avarnas were kept out of the Varna system and were forbidden from acquiring education and knowledge. He admits that the untouchables continued beef-eating which the upper castes had given up long ago. In fact, beef-eating decided their permanent degradation. Dr. Ambedkar's conversion of numerous untouchables to Buddhism did not have the desired effect because the old age-long habits continued, and the caste distinctions were not erased. The caste Hindus regarded the untouchable as a degraded person whether he was a Hindu or Buddhist. Further, the newly converted Buddhists were deprived of the specialised privileges which the untouchable Hindu enjoyed after their conversion to Buddhism.

The pitiable position of the untouchables was first stressed by the Missionaries, who, no doubt, took advantage of the position to convert many of the depressed classes to Christianity. The missionaries opened schools in several places, particularly in southern Tamil Nadu. The London Mission Society started many schools in Madurai, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts and incidentally converted many people.

From the latter part of the 19th century, the Madras Government also paid some attention to the

amelioration of the condition of the depressed classes. Between 1921 and 1931 this work of amelioration improved considerably. The Madras Government appointed a Commissioner of Labour entrusted with the task of encouraging the education of the depressed classes and looking after their economic interest.

Several private societies were also at work as, for example, the Depressed Classes Union, the Poor School Society, and the Social Service League. Meanwhile, some political leaders organized the Self Respect Movement and the Depressed Classes Conference. They were responsible for an awakening in the minds of the non-brahmin people and the depressed classes in particular. The leaders of these parties insisted on the admission of the socially backward pupils in Government and Grant-in aid schools, on opening special schools for the untouchable castes and also on the provision of scholarships and special facilities for the training of depressed class teachers.

On the economic side, the Government of Madras took steps towards the provision of house-sites for the relief of congestion and for purposes of freeing the depressed classes from oppression by their landlords, the organization and running to co-operative societies, the provision of drinking water by constructing new wells and repairing the old ones provisions of burial grounds and sanitary requirements of the depressed classes, the

assignment of land for cultivation on payment of market value in easy installments. As a result of these measures some progress was made. Some schools were constructed; the number of pupils increased and several new co-operative societies were opened. But still much leeway had to be made. For example, in 1931, there were still six Districts in the Madras State untouched by the activities of the Commissioner of Labour.

Meanwhile, thanks to the efforts and propaganda of the social reformers some effort was undertaken by the State in improving the status of some of the backward classes. In 1859 a Proclamation was issued that there was no objection to Shanar women either putting on a jacket or to Shanar women of all creeds dressing in coarse cloth and tying themselves round with it, as the women of the fishermen class do, or to their covering their bosoms in any manner whatever, but not like women of high castes. The objection to untouchable men wearing coats lingered for a long time in backward areas in Southern India. There was even a time when one who ventured to wear a coat was to be beaten by men of higher castes.

The first quarter of the present century witnessed some advance in the improvement of the position of the depressed classes. In 1923 the Government issued a resolution that no grants would be paid to any aided educational institution which refused admission to the children of the Depressed Classes.

However, according to evidence given in Madras before the Lee Commission in 1924, untouchables in such places and before such judges were not permitted to enter the courts, even though they were parties to a case or witnesses, but had to stand far off and their examination was conducted by a go-between who would go out, question them and take their answers to the judge. This was more or less similar to the practice in Malabar for a long time.

In 1923 the Government issued a resolution that no grants would be paid to any aided educational institution which refused admission to the children to the Depressed Classes. But, even in 1923 in Madras, the Government had in its Statute Book a law empowering village magistrates to punish the offenders of the lower castes by imprisonment, though the Government had pledged itself in 1914 to discontinue this inhuman practice. In 1925 a Bill was introduced in the Madras Legislative Council containing a resolution throwing open all public roads, streets or pathways, giving access to any public office, well, tank or place of public resort, to all classes of people including the Depressed. In the Reformed Constitution, the Depressed classes were given special representation in the local and legislative bodies by nomination.

A Committee appointed to consider the question of extending education in Saidapet, reported in 1931 that Hindus of higher grades used every refinement

of social and economic boycott to compel untouchables to withdraw their children from the public schools even to the extent of combining to deny their families employment, food and shelter.

The Legislative Council in Madras passed in 1930–31 an Act affirming the right of all classes and communities to have access to and make use of all public places such as streets, markets and tanks maintained from municipal funds and rendering an obstruction to their use an offence punishable by fine.

But these moves were viewed with great disfavour by the orthodox classes. There were outbreaks of fierce fanaticism. As far back as 1858 there were riots in the region of the Kanyakumari District because Shanar women converts took to wearing clothes above the waist. In 1899 their claim to enter temples in Tirunelveli and the opposition offered by other castes produced violent riots in which thousands were engaged. No wonder that by the end of the 19th century, particularly in the year 1895, the Shanars of Tirunelveli .were concerted *en masse* to Christianity.

In the present century the Congress Government as well as later the D.M.K. (Dràvida Munnerra Kalagam) Government have done a great deal for the improvement of the condition of the Harijans. A large number of schools have been opened particularly in certain regions with a view to benefit

the lower classes. A conspicuous preference has been given to the Harijans in respect of scholarships and appointments in Government service. Housing for Harijans was a major project undertaken by the D.M.K ministry. It is continued by the present Government.

On 11th December 1974, Dr. Karunanidhi declared open four Harijan colonies, which can be more appropriately called as 'Harijan villages' in Tanjavur District. This marks the completion of the first phase of the one lakh housing scheme undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Harijan Housing and Development Corporation to construct 10,000 houses at a cost of Rs. 3 crores, to be given free of cost to the society. These houses are to be built in 278 villages in 14 districts of the south. Even more conspicuous had been the effort of the A.D.M.K. Government.

But while these efforts are laudable in redeeming the downtrodden Harijans from their despicable existence, their segregation in separate groups, cut off from the rest of the community, is not desirable. The objective should be to absorb all Harijans in the Hindu society on terms of equality as quickly as possible. No sense of patronage on one side and inferiority complex on the other should be allowed to continue any longer in the wider interests of the nation as a whole. The basic remedy for achieving this objective is real education for all and the promotion of a sense of equality. As recent

as 1978, the problem of the Harijans and backward classes and the reservations to be made for them in Government service has provoked heated controversies and fierce conflicts in parts of North India, particularly in Bihar. There a conflict has arisen among the affluent higher castes like the Rajputs, the Bhumihars, Brahmins and Kayasthas on the one hand and the Yadavas, the Kurmis and the Koeris of the backward castes on the other. It is not unlikely that similar struggles appear in other parts of India, including Tamil Nadu.

8

MERITS AND DRAWBACKS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The unique institution of caste has been in recent years subjected to a severe condemnation. While the caste has its defects, the services that it has rendered in the past cannot be ignored.

Caste was a part and parcel of and a natural adjunct to Hinduism. Indeed caste and religion are so intermingled that people often take caste for religion. Caste has tended to foster Hindu religion for whatever it is worth, while the Hindu religion too has patronised it and fostered it through the ages.

In the mundane affairs of the world, caste has contributed to economic progress more often than not. It provided for a division of labour and a specialisation in the arts and crafts of the country. Choice of occupation was not always rigorously enforced; nevertheless, the time-honoured

assignment of particular occupations to the various communities had its merits. A greater measure of progress was possible by certain classes of people pursuing the crafts hereditarily. Caste helped the development and transmission of skill, knowledge and behaviour. It has been even said that caste specialisation is that which had made India what it has been. Further, caste kept the Hindu traditions and culture intact for hundreds of years.

In particular the philosophical and intellectual progress attained by the Indians has been due to the specialisation of education by brahmins. Though it meant a historic injustice to the others, from the standpoint of the progress of India, this monopoly of learning at the hands of Brahmins contributed to great intellectual and philosophical progress. Though it is too much to say, as has been made, that every Brahmin student became a walking encyclopaedia, concentration of learning and scholarship in one group facilitated the quicker and efficient development of thought and culture.

But at the same time, in respect of the manual arts and crafts, caste never stood in the way of individual advancement. The Sudras were able to make progress all the time in the field of art, craft and science. They have been the producers, technicians, manufacturers and traders.

A spirit of corporateness was developed among the members of each caste. Not only did the caste

councils exercise an effective control on the conduct and behaviour of the members of each caste, but they worked together in maintaining their status. By organisation and propaganda, a caste could change its name and in course of time get a new one accepted, and by altering its canons of behaviour in the matter of diet and marriage, can increase the estimation in which it was held. For example, it is interesting to observe that each census used to produce a decennial crop of "Visvakarma Brahmins" (Panchala artisans). Several called themselves Kshatriyas. Thus in some cases the institution of caste served as a ladder for rising in the social scale. Naturally those who aspired a higher status tried to prove worthy of it and thus this tendency contributed to the moral elevation of the bulk of the people concerned.

In the religious sphere, the caste system operated in such a manner that the caste could change or modify its social and religious observance in accordance with changing ethical standards or the trend of public opinion. It influenced certain practices, for a great sentimental value was attached to social elevation by the adoption of changed usages. Thus, for example, some castes desirous of rising in the estimation of the people, insisted on their members giving up the keeping and eating of pigs and chicken. Another of the early steps usually taken by a low caste wishing to rise in public esteem was the imposition of a ban on the remarriage of widows.

The caste system promotes cleanliness and order in a relative measure. The disapprobation of the elders in a caste served as a restraining force against unclean habits and even immoral conduct. It served also as a bond of union among all classes of the Hindu community. But this is almost a thing of the past. In comparison; the corporate spirit among people of other religions like Islam and Christianity, is weak among the Hindus. In the past, caste served as a potent factor in integrating Indian society and in welding into one community the various competing, if not incompatible groups composing it. Some of these groups have been occupational or religious. Others have been national, political and tribal societies, that must otherwise have either been absorbed and transformed or remained as unadjusted and possibly subversive elements. Their organization as members of castes paved the way for orderliness and unity. Generally speaking, conquered peoples and their conquerors blend into one society in which one or the other element may in the long run predominate. The caste system has effectively dealt with problems such as these which other societies have failed to solve. True, there are defects in the caste system which will be considered shortly.

The caste system has served as a political stabilizer, too. As Abbe Dubois states, the caste system is responsible for the preservation of India from complete barbarism and as the sure basis of orderly government, as a defence against despotism and a means for preserving the arts and as a sure

means of preserving the Hindu pattern of culture under the regime of alien conquerors. Perfectly conscious of the drawbacks of the caste system, he is also aware of its service in the past. He says "I do not consider caste to be free from many great drawbacks, but I believe that the resulting advantages, in the case of a nation constituted like the Hindus, more than outweigh the resulting evils."[67]

That the caste has served also as a social stabilizer is obvious. Indian society has survived a vast number of invasions, famine, revolutions and social upheavals of all kinds, and this is largely due to the caste system on which that society has constructed itself, a system which often survived even conversion to Islam or Christianity.

For achieving social justice it is an effective instrument. A caste union is a potent force in united action as in strikes of sweepers, scavengers and other workers. Caste plays an increasingly effective role in the elections to political bodies. While it has its merits, it operates against the real ideals of democracy. For regulating social functions caste has had a vital role to play. The caste system provides for the various functions necessary to social life, "functions ranging from education to scavenging, from government to domestic service of the most menial kind". In co-operative effort in social functions caste plays an important role. At the preparations of feasts as well as in connection with other items of the marriage ceremony it is the caste

people who run to one's help. These and similar affairs of every day life require the co-operation of one's caste people. It has been rightly said that castes are small and complete social worlds in themselves, marked off definitely from one another, though subsisting within the larger society.

Finally, for the achievement of certain desirable social objectives, the caste can be employed as an useful instrument. For example, certain groups of Brahmins of South India decided to put an end to the practice of taking money for a bride, which custom was prevalent among them. In respect of dowry or the adoption of birth control, the leaders of caste can render effective service. The oilmongers of Kanch, proposed to bind themselves by certain conditions about donations to temples and to observe them as 'jatidharma' i.e. duty owed to the caste by every member.[68] The feeling of caste-solidarity was and even today to some extent is so strong that it is truly described as caste-patriotism and properly guided, it can be turned to good account. Since caste encouraged group solidarity, caste has been defined by its admirers as "ancient time-tested socialism maintaining the balance of power between the vocational classes".

To conclude, the consideration of the merits of the caste system, the views of certain outstanding writers may be quoted.[69] Sri Monier Williams observed in his "Brahmanism and Hinduism' that caste has been useful in promoting self-sacrifice, in

securing subordination of the individual to an organized body, in restraining from vice and in preventing pauperism. Meredith Townsend wrote in 'Europe and Asia': "I firmly believe caste to be a marvellous discovery, a form of socialism which through ages has protected Hindu society from anarchy and from the worst evils of industrial and competitive life; it is an automatic poor-law to begin with and the strongest form known of trade unions".

But when all is said, this provides only one side of the picture. There are several defects and shortcomings in the caste system. Particularly foreigners have not always understood the inner weaknesses of the caste system.

DRAWBACKS

As against the several advantages which have accrued from the caste system, many defects have appeared. As years passed on, it may be said that the disadvantages have become more and more serious.

Firstly the divisions increased; many new castes and subcastes appeared, which led to acrimony and caste rivalry. Exclusiveness and bitterness followed. The first disintegrating element in caste was the 'dvija' baptism, which drew a line between the twice-born and those that were not twice born. This was

followed through the centuries by the phenomenal growth of horizontal and vertical divisions of caste.

The correlation of caste to occupation had its advantages. But there were evil effects, too. Perhaps the most grievous consequence was the denial of education to the Sudras. In the beginning, the Sudra was debarred from learning the Veda. Following this, in due course they were denied the benefit of education. It is an irrational and unfair discrimination which deprived the non-Brahmins and particularly the Sudras of the opportunity of intellectual development to a great extent.

Less permanent in its effect was the continued economic backwardness of certain sections and of many individuals in the community. Since occupation was associated with caste, caste imposed a limit on the income of the members of the different castes and this had an inevitable influence on the peoples' economy.

In politics too, the caste distinctions and animosities led to frustration and failure to achieve the proper ideals of democracy. Caste exerts a great influence on electioneering and on legislative and executive responsibilities. It used to be a slogan that no votes of the Vanniyar caste were to be cast in favour of others. The influence of caste on village leadership and factionalism is described in a number of field studies, reported in a book edited by Park and Tinker.

It is observed that in many constituencies the sub-caste groups are too small to form an effective majority, whereas the Varna groups of castes are large enough to do this. This might explain the apparent paradox that politics is weakening subcaste, while it is strengthening caste (Varna group).

Psychologists have tried to study the nature of inter-caste prejudices and the influence of caste on the personality and outlook of its members. There is much bitterness and corroding currents of ill feeling between castes, particularly over the scramble for jobs. The favourable considerations accorded to particular castes in the matter of appointments and promotions foment the ill-feeling, and what is worse, they impair the efficiency of the service. Ghurye, a noted writer of Indian caste, states that during the last three or four decades there is a tendency for every caste to form an association of its members in order to procure scholarships and to further the special interests of that caste. Such organisations try to guard and enhance the social status in the hierarchy. Claims and counter claims, bitterness and jealousy follow. There is a tendency for mutual acrimony to grow on what it feeds. However, the claim of the lower classes who had been denied education for ages, for preferential treatment is not irrational. How to effect a safe and sound reconciliation between the claims and their consequences deserve to be considered dispassionately.

The tyranny of the caste system in the past was even more abominable. The inhuman treatment meted out to the lower sections of the community was horrible. These have been considered earlier. Even when the economic position of certain classes improved, the deprivation of privileges continued. For example, the Shanars of Southern India, in spite of the wealth they have acquired, were not given the right to build two-storeyed houses, to wear gold ornaments or use an umbrella.

"The greatest hindrance to all social reforms is the caste." Any kind of deviation from the age-long tradition, however irrational it was, was viewed with disfavour and stoutly resisted. For example, if a respectable man of the untouchable class is invited to a house; the caste council would deliver its judgment against the householder and condemn him as unfit for intercourse. Again, the degradation in the position of women was sanctioned and continued by the caste system. In fact the higher the caste the lower was the freedom of women.

Social unity is sacrificed to sectional benefit. In the desire to help one's caste fellows many forget the principle of social justice and are led to do consciously or otherwise injustice to the members of other castes. Very often, irrational practices appear. For instance, early this century the Brahmins of Madras started a fund called "The Triplicane Fund", shares which could be held only by Brahmins. Those responsible for starting it included

gentlemen of 'culture, education and learning'. Very narrow outlook indeed! Those who decry excess of communalism should themselves first set the example of a healthy, wholesome, non-communal outlook in practical affairs of life.[70]

As against Brahmins who were supposed to be the only successors of the Aryans there appeared the Justice Party and the Dravidian Federation and still later the Dravida Kalagam and Dravida Munnetra Kalagam. They have often become bitter and vituperous opponents of the Brahmins. General ideas of caste and racial hostility influenced by atheism on the one hand and semi-Marxist ideology of social equality on the other, combined to become formidable foes of the age-old beliefs and practices.

The caste system was once the soul as well as the body of Hinduism. The inequalities and iniquities of the caste system are justified by the Hindu belief in the transmigration of souls combined with the doctrine of Karma. When the caste system was initiated, it possessed several merits, but with the change of time and with the growth of vested interests, it lost almost all its strength. As has been stated earlier, caste in the beginning was flexible and mobile. This is evident from Manu's prescriptions of marriage which allow *anuloma* and prohibits *pratiloma*. But gradually it became rigid and stereotyped. As Malley puts it "the caste system became a steel frame of the Hindu social structure". As the divisions grew more and more rigid, the

caste system lost many of its advantages. Sherrings, an authority on the subject of caste, characterises the social mechanism as "a monstrous engine of pride, dissension and shame", and has not one word to say with reference to it or in favour of its authors, the Brahmins.

An unfortunate circumstance is that the castes instead of becoming reduced in number have increased and are increasing. The new divisions which have emerged and are emerging are sub-castes, and not castes. The rise of new subcastes is due to several factors: (1) Commonly the adoption of new occupations or new patterns of old occupations gives rise to subcastes. Soon new theories of legends emerge claiming superiority over the others. (2) Often subcastes are formed by the adoption of new or reformed customs such as are followed by the higher castes; for example, by forbidding the remarriage of widows, by adopting the practice of child marriage or by adopting vegetarianism. It must be remembered that those who have adopted the reformed practices look down upon their erstwhile castefellows with supreme contempt. (3) Sometimes a new subcaste arises by the adoption of a religious cult or a religious practice; as Sir Alfred Lyall puts it, 'sects always tend to become subcastes'. (4) Occasionally subcastes arise as a consequence of migration of one caste to a different part of the country. (5) Finally, change in economic position leads to the formation of virtually a subcaste. In recent times there is a tendency for

certain subcastes to merge with each other. Education and changes in economic position partly account for it. The non-availability of suitable matches in one's own subcaste is a basic factor promoting this wholesome change.

It is well known that the caste system is especially rigid in South India, where it even affects the lay-out of villages. The houses of Brahmins are in one quarter, those of the Sudra castes in another, and among the latter any caste that is sufficiently large in number will have a separate block. Just outside the fields, still further removed from the village site, cluster the huts of degraded castes like the Paraiyar.

On the whole, in the present state of affairs the caste system is a very harmful institution. No wonder, caste is often described by European scholars as an iron chain which has fettered each class to the profession of their ancestors and has rendered any improvement on their own part impossible. This view may, to some extent, be regarded as correct so far as the lower classes are concerned. But with regard to the higher classes, caste is a golden chain which they have willingly placed around their necks and which had fixed them only to that which is noble and praiseworthy from their point of view.

Sir Henry Maine in his 'Ancient Law' described the caste system as "the most disastrous and blighting of all human institutions." Dr. Rabindranath Tagore

described it as a gigantic system of cold-blooded repression; and held that the regeneration of the Indian people solely depends upon its removal. Joseph Chailley wrote that "caste bars out altruism, unity and patriotism", and that "its rules render true social life and progress impossible." Lack of flexibility was responsible for most of its faults. No wonder, Rev. Mateer cried out: "A most cruel and selfish thing is Hindu caste."

9

THE FUTURE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

Caste had its merits and defects. But in the present age of rationalism it is realised that the defects outweigh its merits. There is not doubt that caste and casteism have imposed disastrous consequences on Hindu society. Beginning from the time of Lord Buddha, several large-hearted leaders have condemned the caste system and have offered solutions to its destruction. Kabir, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Swami Ramakrishna, Ambedkar and numerous other reformers have called for a revision of the caste. Many have felt the imperative need for changing the traditionally stratified society and achieve the goal of egalitarian social order. But few have effectively succeeded in providing a solution for the achievement of their object. The development of a casteless society must be the aim of every right-minded Indian. On the other hand, many have repeatedly urged that "The caste system, the steel frame of Hinduism, is held to have been divinely

ordained and is connected with the law of Karma, according to which a man's status in this life is determined by his actions in past lives".[72]

In one way caste was a *democratic* institution, as its laws and regulations were the expression of the common will, to which all had to yield obedience. On the other hand, the system was the *negation of democratic principles*, its own cardinal principle being a belief in the inherent and divinely ordained inequality of man.

Some of the orthodox sections are really against any change in the system; but they do not have the courage or the facility to resist the upsurge against the caste. Even among others who profess to realise the need for a change, not many are sincere. Some rationalists among the higher sections and many of the lower classes are vaguely in favour of the abolition of the caste system, though all of them are not sure of the ways and means of achieving the goal.

In this connection the existence of a certain measure of hypocrisy common among certain classes of the Hindus should be reiterated. This is the jealousy of people about the castes immediately above them, and contempt towards those immediately below. Although the lower castes struggle to ascend the social order, they are individually insistent that those below them should not rise higher.

Each caste tries to prove that it is equal to a 'superior' caste and superior to its 'equals'. Ingenious arguments are advanced to prove the superiority. Even many of those who profess to decry casteism and think that caste is on its last legs are inwardly proud of their own superior position in the gradation of caste. This is true of even many Westernized members of the upper classes. These people may observe very few dietetic restrictions, marry outside caste, but none of these means always ensures that they have escaped entirely the bonds of caste. They show caste attitudes in surprising contexts. Narrow communalism is often rampant. In the first popular cabinet in Mysore headed by K. C. Reddy, not only were the ministers chosen on a caste basis, but each had a secretary from his own sub-subsub caste. In Tamil Nadu too, the Vellala, Nadar, Vanniyar rivalries find their place.

In actuality the caste Hindus are opposed to Harijan uplift or even to elevate the classes immediately below them. The amusing circumstance is that in the political and administrative sphere there is an acute struggle between castes to be classified as 'back-ward' in order to secure preferential treatment in the attempt to get employment, seats in educational institutions, etc.

The difficulties in eradicating caste from our social organization are serious. In fact, as M. N. Srinivas says: "Caste is an institution of prodigious strength and it will take a lot of beating

before it will die. But a realisation of this difficulty should not prevent us from taking all possible steps to prepare the ground for the disintegration and final collapse of the institution of caste."

The basic solution is the adoption of intermarriage between castes, because the vital difference between caste and class is endogamy. But though several have advocated it, it has not received that wide popularity which would hasten the liquidation of caste. Bold and educated youngsters must come forward, and the Government can even encourage it by according a preferential treatment to such couples in the matter of employment. This would be much better than providing easy employment only on the basis of caste.

In the year 1964, in Mysore, twenty brave bachelor students vowed intermarriage and wanted to popularise it. By and large they proved successful. In Tamil Nadu, as in the rest of India, this laudable example must be followed. The scheme of intermarriages must be undertaken by young couples themselves. Those arranged by the elders are less likely to prove successful. In this connection it must be said that co-education deserves encouragement, though conservatives are against it.

Further, caste patriotism must be fought on all fronts. Caste must be ignored; Government should avoid indicating it in all public announcements, applications for appointments, etc. Caste must be,

if at all, purely an individual affair. But it is very doubtful whether in practice it can be achieved. Caste consciousness persists in a surreptitious manner. Secretly the caste and subcaste to which persons belong are ascertained. Not infrequently those who profess to be nationalists are communalists to the core. This must be clearly exposed and condemned. Even others who foment communal rivalry must be considered enemies of society. Among certain aggressively backward castes, the declaration of one's caste is held to be a matter of importance. When the then Revenue Minister, Manikkavelu Naicker, announced in 1958 that he would no longer use 'Naicker', as his surname of the caste to which he belonged, namely the Vanniyakula Kshatriyar, he was accused of showing disrespect to the entire community.

The tendency to glorify one's caste and to exalt its superiority must be viewed with great disfavour. It is a weakness with some to speak high of one's caste, subcaste or family status though in a subtle manner. These must be considered really vulgar, not to be tolerated by a cultured society.

Nor should anyone justify the continuance of the spirit, if not the form, of the caste system by convert appeals to unity and continuity. For instance, so recently as January 10, 1976, Sri R. Balasubramanya Iyer of Dindigul writes in the 'Hindu' that "it must be the primary duty of everyone to strive hard for the promotion of good-

will, brotherliness, peace and unity. The path of practical wisdom lies in the achievement of unity in the midst of diversity, and that will be real abolition of caste without its annihiliation.' It is submitted that these empty words have come too late in the day.

In fact, as S. Obul Reddi, the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, had suggested, legislation must be introduced abolishing the entire fabric of caste system and announcement of one's own caste by any means must be made punishable, as has been done in the case of untouchability.

It is true that it may not be possible to eradicate overnight a system which has flourished for many centuries by a stroke of the legislative pen. Our customs, manners, ways of dressing, caste marks, surnames, the accent of the mother-tongue are all conditioned to a large extent by the all-pervasive caste system. But these too, must be gradually changed and made uniform. Urbanization has had a considerable effect in this direction. But it must be actually adopted as part of an organized plan by social reformers.

Unfortunately the policy of encouraging the progress of the backward and depressed classes by the Government has proceeded in some respects in an unwise direction, because caste segregation and nomenclature are strengthened and sought to be perpetuated. Even more dangerous is the practice of building houses and hostels for people of particular

castes in certain localities. This has a very unwholesome effect. In fact, people of different castes must be compelled to live together in colonies and hostels and study together in schools and colleges. All devices for the shedding of separatism in all spheres must be adopted. Repeating again, in the matter of allotment of houses, too, preference may be given to those who have adopted intermarriages.

Moreover, the rigidity in the matter of choosing occupations must vanish. A far more important prescription is that the people of the lower castes who had been so far victims of unclean habits must be made to reform themselves. Leaders of the depressed classes must assume the role of genuine reformers of their community. In particular vegetarianism must be adopted by people of all castes. It has to be emphasised that vegetarianism was and is believed to accord a position of superiority in the gradation of caste. Instead of compelling vegetarians to change their pattern of diet, it would be easier and better in the long run for non-vegetarians to adopt a vegetarian diet for achieving social equality. In fact a process of Brahamanization of all Hindus would be a noble ideal.

Often, stress is laid on people of all castes being permitted to serve as priests in temples. It is doubtful whether this reformation may serve to break down the feeling of superiority on the part of brahmins.

Even so, the Government of Tamil Nadu has undertaken the step of addressing the Government of India to permit the legalisation of throwing open priesthood in temples to all qualified persons irrespective of caste. No one can deny the tremendous efforts made by the D.M.K. to break down the barriers of caste, though certain modifications of their policy would be desirable. It is expected that the still more advanced A.D.M.K will introduce them.

An important step now undertaken, and necessary to be developed still further, is the need to provide educational facilities to the backward classes which had been denied education over the centuries. It is nothing but historic justice that those who had been denied over the ages the facilities to cultivate intelligence, memory and imagination should be provided with all the requirements for sound education.

That would tend to remove the sense of inferiority complex now common among the lower classes. It was said that in Karnataka "the innate characteristic of the Harijan is his meekness and almost stoic acceptance of his lot as the lowest in the social hierarchy, with hardly any trace of militancy in contrast to the characteristics associated with other minorities like the Muslims and Christians." More or less the same is true of the Harijans in Tamil Nadu, too. The degradation which they had been suffering for ages has left its mark on their

outlook. Though this attitude is now gradually disappearing, the Harijans were shy of mixing with others in restaurants and other eating houses. The change for the better which has appeared, must still further be encouraged.

As a social leader, Mr. Khairamody pointed out, the Harijans or neo-Buddhists are still not emerging from their seclusion. The result is that despite education, their "in-living" does not broaden their outlook. This is in a large measure true of the Harijans in Tamil Nadu as well. Gradually a healthy change is appearing for good among the student community.

For raising their position, economic independence must be provided. The land ceiling law must be enforced to their advantage. Moreover, more and more of them should benefit by industrialization and urbanization.

Degrading occupations like scavenging and flaying of cattle must be taken away from the Harijans. In fact they should not be thrust upon people of certain castes only. Gandhiji was particularly insistent on that.

It need hardly be mentioned that in respect of temple entry and in the removal of untouchability as a whole, the lead given by Gandhiji is epoch-making. But this great champion of the Harijans would not disturb the age-long Varnashrama system.

His explanation for this anamalous attitude is not convincing.

In fact the cornerstone of the caste system has been religion. The leaders of the Hindu religion sanctioned caste discrimination and untouchability. No wonder that the Buddha fought against caste and Brahmanism. In spite of many others opposing them, these have survived with a marvellous resilience.

The conversion of Hindus to Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity or Islam has not succeeded in obliterating the distinctions of caste. An Indian Christian goes so far as to say that owing to caste influences the convert finds that the Xian community is not a homogeneous community but is divided into castes and parties, mutually exclusive, jealous and inimical.[72]

The depressed classes or untouchables have the least objecting to renouncing Hinduism and embracing Xianity because by so doing they acquire a higher status. (O'Malley p 673). Naturally one solution suggested was the total abandonment of religion and faith in God. This atheism was promoted and developed by the Dravida Kalagam. But though this is not the place to question the rationale behind atheism, there is objection to the abandonment of religion on moral grounds. Religion has been the sustainer and prop of morality. It is in that direction that religion has to be viewed by the rationalist.

A negation of God would militate against the authority of an ethical code, because morality is closely allied to religion.

A religious belief which would stretch beyond the trammels of caste would be essential for the progress of humanity. G.K. Pillai states that a movement towards casteless gods is already visible in Malabar, where socialism is also rampant. With the gradual disappearance of caste as it is now there, a reaction in favour of Sasta worship is well in evidence. In the worship of Sasta, no caste restrictions are observed. Pilgrims to places like Sabari-Malai to worship Sasta, observe no caste; there the Brahmin, non-brahmin, untouchable, all on perfect equality, repair to the presence of the diety. It is interesting to note that Sasta (the Dravidian diety) was till recently, without the sacred thread, though a few years ago, like other Hindu Gods, Sasta too has become brahmanised, but it has not introduced other caste distinctions.

My own conviction is that Theosophy may come to the aid of eradicating the evils of caste. It is said that Theosophy is against caste. But from the large number of high caste Hindus having become members of the Society in recent times, there is a suspicion that it is not truly catholic. This can be removed by Theosophy actively adopting a policy of converting many of the Hindus of lower castes. Theosophy stands for universal religion and it would be most appropriate if it receives within its fold by

active propaganda people of all castes among Hindus in the first instance. G.S. Arundale's "The Besant Spirit" really advocates the brotherhood of religion and it is applicable in the present context to India in particular. In fact, the aim of the Theosophic society is to promote universal brotherhood without distinction of any kind.

ENDNOTES

1. In the Rig Veda, the word 'Varna' is never applied to any one of the four groups. It is only the Arya Varna (or the Aryan people) that is contrasted with the (Dasa Varna). On the other hand, the Satapata Brahmana describes the four groups as four Varnas. (Vedic Index II, p. 247). It must be noted that 'Jati' and 'Varna' are quite different in origin and in function. Varna literally means colour, and it seems probable that the four Varnas arose from the class structure of the Vedic Aryan tribesmen under the influence on the one hand of contact with the darker aborigines and on the other, of the rising pretensions of the priesthood, who constituted themselves as a separate class.

2. *See* G. S. Ghurye: Caste and Class in India (New Third Edition in India) pp. 46–7.. But it must be noted that the nucleus of the four-fold division is found in the Rig Veda itself which speaks of three classes of society, Brahma, Kshatra and Vis. It is only in the later Purushasukta hymn that a reference occurs to the four orders of society.

3. Abbe Dubois: Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies (3rd edition) p. 31.

4. Risley: People of India (1915) pp. 270 ff. Risley states that the conquering Aryans behaved towards the conquered Dravidians in the same way as some planters in America behaved towards the African slaves.

5. L.S.O.O' Malley: Indian Caste Customs (1932), pp. 13–14.

6. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British have a kind of plural society in which different elements perform different functions. But they are not hereditary.

7. J. H. Hutton in his 'Caste in India' 2nd edn., 1951, has stated that by the middle of this century over 5000 books have appeared on caste. These have been written not only by ethnologists, statisticians, economists, missionaries and historians but also by caste organizations.

8. G. K. Pillay: Origin and Development of Caste (Kitab Mahal, 1959), 106–8.

9. *Ibid.* pp. 142–44. The question of Mundas having been the ancestors of Brahmins of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa is seriously questioned by anthropologists and ethnologists. But it is undeniable that in some parts of the country like Tamil Nadu large numbers of tribal people were absorbed into brahminical society.

10. Manu Smriti was first translated into English in 1794 by Sir William Jones, the father of modern Indology. That publication led to numberless studies on Hinduism, and particularly on the caste system.

11. A. L. Basham thinks that the Purushasukta hymn was perhaps composed about 900 BC. See his "Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture" p. 6.

12. It must however be observed that Hutton's explanation of the complex institution by a single factor has its limitations.

13. Purananuru: 335: 7–8. This verse suggests that these four, viz., tudiyan, papan, paraiyan and kadamban were the early inhabitants. Only the names might have appeared later.

14. Puram; 183.

15. It is important to remember that the lowest or fourth category was never called Sudra except by the Brahmins. The earliest reference in Tamil literature of 'Sudra' is in the commentary to the Periyapuranam of Arumuka Navalar; he speaks of the fourth class as 'Sat Sudra'. The Sangam works like the Paripadal and Nanmanikkadigai state that the Vellalar were agriculturists and landowners but they do not describe them as Sudras.

16. Tol. Marapiyal: 631. Some writers hold that these 'Sudras' like several others are later interpolations. But this view is not proved.

17. *Ibid.* 636.

18. *Ibid.* 637. This can be compared with the fact that the Pallavas called themselves 'Brahma Kshatriyas' as may be seen from the Pallankoil inscription, the Kasakudi Plates and other inscriptions. The Pullur Plates trace the origin of the Pallavas to Drona; and all the Pallavas though Brahmins by birth, were Kshatriyas by occupation. See the author's paper entitled "Were the Pallavas Brahmins"? Annals of Oriental Research Silver Jubilee Volume.

19. As noticed earlier K. A. N. Sastry wrote in the *Hindu* of April 17, 1960: "We do not possess a single line of Tamil literature demonstrably ante-dating the contact between the pre-Aryan Tamil and Aryan Sanskrit cultures." What is the implication? The Sangam works are all products of the fusion between the pre-Aryan and Sanskrit languages! Some of the early Sangam works and their vocabulary must be looked into before such mistaken and preconceived ideas are paraded. Again, the same historian, misquoting Caldwell who wrote in 1856, holds that "the pre-Aryan Tamils had a rather primitive and poorish culture." See his "The Culture and History of the Tamils" (1963) p. 7.

20. Kuram Plates: Line 17. S.I.I. Vol. I. p. 152.

21. There has been a doubt whether the Pallavas were Brahmins. But they described themselves as 'Brahmakshatriyas'. The probability is, as stated earlier, they were Brahmins who took to fighting and thus became Kshatriyas in fact.

22. *See* S.I.I., Vol. I, p. 35 ff.

23. S.I.I. Vol. II. p. 265.

24. S.I.I. Vol. II. Part III, p. 278.

25. 7 of 1898.

26. 84 of 1892.

27. S.I.I. Vol. I, p. 154.
28. 6 and 64 of 1898.
29. Tiruvalangadu Plates, 1.456
30. A.R.E. 1921, II, 47.
31. 189 of 1925.
32. Dr. K. Minakshisundaram: Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures, 1974 January to June, pp. 4–7; particularly the concluding para on p.7.
33. "Brahmin and peasant in early South Indian history": Adyar Library Bulletin: 1967–68.
34. Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, Vol. 10, No. 1 pp. 135–6.
35. V.R.R. Dikshitar: War in Ancient India, pp. 183, 184.
36. Kalittogai: 4 : 3, 5 : 2. I think that the Kalittogai was one of the later works of the Ettuttogai of the Sangam age. Even so, it cannot be placed later than the 5th century AD.
37. O'Malley: Indian Caste Customs (1932), p. 43 and J. H. Hutton: Caste in India, (1961), p. 11. Although the Kallas, Maravas and Agambadiyas have several common characteristics, there are differences too. See S. Kadhirvel, himself a Marava, writing about this in 1977 in his "A History of the Maravas" pp. 14–15.
38. S.I.I. Vol. I, 86.7; Vol. III 121, 123.
39. A.R.E. 1933–4.
40. As observed earlier, the Kammalas wore the holy thread. They claimed the right of performing their own marriages and religious ceremonies.
41. A.R.E. 1925: 397; 1925 : 18; 1900 : 80.
42. T.W. Ellis: Kural, p. 44, quoted in the Madras Journal of Literature and Science. 1887–88.

43. Nelson, Madura Manual, Part II, Ch. I, p. 5.
44. Venkayya's Introduction to S.I.I. Vol. II. p. 9.
45. Velaikkar was a general name for troops, as is made clear by the Mahavamsa. See K.A.N. Sastri: Colas (Second Edition), page. 315. See also M. Srinivasa Iyengar: Tamil Studies, p. 101. Velaikkar served also as functionaries of temples and as soldiers at times.
46. It may be noted here that the Tiruvalisvaram inscription (120 of 1905) speaks of 'Munrukai Mahasenai'.
47. 189 of 1895. A theory has been advanced that originally the people of South India were followers of the matriarchal system. When the Aryans penetrated into Tamilaham, they introduced patriarchy. Those who adopted patriarchy belonged to the Right Hand while those who resisted it were of the Left Hand. This view is fantastic.
48. A.R.E. 1936–37.
49. A.R.E. 31 of 1936–37.
50. A.R.E. 1926: 253 (p.11).
51. Taylor: Catalogue Raissonance III, p. 305.
52. A.R.E . No. 92 of 1918.
53. S.I.I. Vol. V. No. 554.
54. A.R.E. 476 of 1921.
55. S.I.I. Vol., No. 238.
56. Abbe Dubois: 'Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, ed. By Beauchamp, p. 27. f.n.I. In Pondicherry and Karaikkal the distinction between the Right and Left Hand castes ceased to exist only by the 1860's.
57. Madras Census Report of 1911, p. 138.
58. Bombay Census Report of 1911. Part I, p. 201.
59. F. Buchanan: A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar.

60. Wilson: Indian Caste; II, p. 79.

61. Madras Census, 1891, p. 224.

62. G. K. Pillai: Origin and Development of Caste (1959), pp. 176–7. Though the theory advanced by this writer is feasible, it seems to have had only a local application. Dr. Ambedkar in his book "*Who were the Shudras*"? traces the origin of untouchability to the measures taken by the Hindus to keep the Buddhists away, who had refused to be converted to Hinduism. This too is not convincing.

63. Puram: 82 and 287.

64. Rowe: Every day Life in India: p. 80.

65. Risley, Sir Herbert: The People of India, p. 112.

66. Rivers: Social Organization, p. 153. Tiyan is the name used as an alternative for Ilava in certain places in Kerala.

67. Abbe Dubois: Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies; Third Edition, p. 28.

68. The Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, Vol. II, (ed. 1883), p. 575.

69. LSS O'Malley: Indian Caste System: Preface. There have been some gross exaggerations. A Dutch Indologist, G.H. Mees in his work "Dharma and Society" prescribes the ancient Indian caste system as a panacea for the social evils of the West. Among numerous Indian writers, Chakladar is prominent in glorifying the old caste system. See his "Social Life in Ancient India" pp. 203-4.

70. The Indian Social Reformer, Bombay, October 10, 1926.

71. L.S.S. O'Malley: Modern India and the West (1941), p. 354.

72. P.N.F. Young and A. Ferrers, "India in Conflict" (1920) p. 134.

INDEX

A

Abbe Dubois 20, 85, 136
Achyuta Kalappalar 48
Adi Dravidas 111, 121
Aegean civilisation 32
Agambadiyar 42, 53, 55, 56
Agraharas 38
Ahambadi Udaiyans 42
Ahananuru 29, 42, 46
Alavar 36
Alfred Lyall 20
Ambalakkarar 31
Ambattan 64
Ambedkar 117, 125, 126, 147
Ananta Sivacharya 41
Anarya 16
Andanar 24, 33
Anuloma 143
Anuloma marriage 44
Arasar 24, 33
Archakas 41
Arcot 122
Arindama 70
Ariyur 50
Arthasastra 13, 14, 117
Arundale, G.S. 158
Aruvai Vanigar 38
Aryans 9
Aryavarta 16
Ashtasahasram 29
Atri 16
Australia 31
Avarnas 115, 126
Ayar 25, 27
Ayogava 113

B

Balasubramanya Iyer 151
Balija 75
Basavalingappa 123
Baudhayana Dharmasutra 11
Beadle 98
Bedars 80
Beri 51
Beri Chettis 48, 50, 77
Bhatta 41, 43
Bhils 31
Bhrigu 12
Bhumihars 132
Blunt 93
Brahma 9
Brahmanas 12, 13
Brahmin 2, 9, 30, 13, 14, 15, 24, 47, 132, 134, 138, 143, 145
Brihacharanam 29
Buddhayana 44

C

Casta 1
Caste councils 99
Chakkiliya 51, 61, 79, 82
Chakkiliyans 80, 117
Chakkiliyar 61

Chandala 4, 16, 12, 45, 113, 115, 116, 117
Chaturvarnya pattern 37
Chera 46
Chetti 48, 76
Chetties 69
Chola 43, 46, 118
Chola Purva Pattayam 76
Chuckler 82
Coimbatore 51

D

Damodara Bhatta 41
Dantivarman 41, 42
Dasas 2
Dasyus 10, 16
Dattasivan 41
Denzil Ibbleston 21
Depressed classes 111, 121, 127, 129
Devadasis 40, 58
Devaradiyar 40
Dharma 13
Dharmasastras 12, 17, 116
Dirghatamas 11
Dravidians 9
Dvija baptism 14, 19
Dvijas 12, 24

E

Eirriyar 36
Ellis, T.N. 76
External castes 115
Eyinar 35

F

Fick 11, 15

G

Gandhiji 155
Garcia de Orta 1
Gautama 16, 44
Gautamiputra Satakarni 37
Golikas 37
Gurukula 14
Gurukkal 41
Gustav Oppert 77

H

Halikas 37
Hand group 69
Harijans 111, 119, 131, 154, 155
Heimin 4
Henry Maine 145
Herbert Risley 123
Hinduism 138
Hoysalas 46
Hutton 22

I

Idaiya 26
Idaiyan Sendan Korranar 42
Idaiyar 31, 36, 42
Idaiyar Nedunkiranar 42
Idangai 69, 76, 79, 80, 82, 84
Iiyavar 36
Ilamputchi 42
Ilavan 124
Ilavar 42
Ilavas 59
Ilayattakkudi 50
Irula 112
Irular 23
Isakki 120

J

Jati 2
Jatidharma 138
Jatis 36

Jolly 11, 15
Joseph Chailley 146
Justice party 103

K

Kabir 147
Kabirpanthis 20
Kadaisiyar 118
Kadamban 28
Kadambar 23, 34, 36
Kadavar 38
Kaduvetti 39
Kaikkolar 31, 57
Kaikkolas 76
Kal tachchan 66
Kalamar 36
Kalittogai 54, 62
Kalla 49, 53
Kallar 31, 53, 55, 56, 121, 122
Kalluka 16, 17
Kammalans 65, 86
Kammalar 31, 65, 66, 74, 85
Kammalas 69, 71, 73, 75, 82, 84, 123
Kammiyar 36, 65
Kampavarman23 39
Kanigaiyar 40
Kannan 66
Karaham 33
Karikala Chola 76
Karkarta Vellalas 45, 46
Karuman 66
Karunanidhi 131
Kasukkarar Chettis 48
Katti 62
Kattu Naicka 112
Kautilya 12, 14
Kavasha 11
Kaverippattinam 49, 50
Kayasthas 132
Khairamody 155
Kharias 8
Kilais 55
Kilakkattai 62
Kodichiyar 28
Kodiyar 28
Koeris 132
Koils 50
Kollan 66
Kollar 36
Komatti Chettis 51, 77
Kondaikkatti Vellalar 46, 47, 48
Kondaiyankottai Maravans 55
Konga 62
Kongu Vellalas 45, 46
Kosar 36
Kovalan 36
Krishna Sastry 39
Kshatrian 2
Kshatriyas 9, 12, 13, 15, 24, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35, 55
Kudimagan 64
Kudirai Chettis 52
Kulamkilar 41
Kulasekhara Alvar 60
Kulkarni V.B. 120
Kulottunga I 44, 45
Kulottunga III 60, 71, 74, 76
Kurattiyar 28
Kurava 26, 31
Kuravar 25, 27, 28, 36
Kurinchi 25, 26
Kurinji 27, 28
Kurmis 132
Kurumba 112
Kurumbar 36
Kuttan 28

Kuttar 36
Kuyavar 36

L

Left hand groups 72
Left Hand castes 66, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 80, 85
Left Hand group 75, 86
Left Hand Komattis 52
Lingayats 102
Lord Curzon 104

M

Macleod 101
Madan 120
Madhusudana Sivan 41
Madigar 80
Madigas 51, 117
Madras 51
Maduraikkanchi 65
Magadha 38
Mahabharata 18
Mahabhashya 117
Mahendravarman II 37
Malavar 25, 27, 36
Malaya 31
Mallan 28
Manava 17
Manava Dharma Sastra 15, 16
Manikkattar 40
Manikkavelu Naicker 151
Manimekalai 48
Manu 9, 10, 15, 16, 64, 143
Manusmriti 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 44
Maravan 54, 55, 89
Maravan caste 88
Maravar 25, 27, 31, 35, 53, 54, 56
Marco Pola 52
Marudam 25, 26, 27
Mateer, Rev. 146
Max Muller 10
Meykandar 48
Mid-day Madigas 51
Minakshi 39, 41
Mlechcha 16
Monier Williams 17, 138
Morasu 62
Mritapa 117
Mudaliars 122
Mudalis 57
Mukkol 33
Mukkulattor 56
Mullai 25, 27
Mundas 9
Munram Padaiynar 81
Munrukai Mahasenai 81
Munrukai Velaikkarar 81
Munrukaipadainar 81

N

Nadans 59, 60
Nadar 55, 58, 60, 149
Nagarattar Chettis 48
Naicker 151
Nakkirar 30
Nanchinad Vellalas 45
Nandi Pottaraiyar 38
Nanmanikkadigai 65
Narrinai 65
Nattaman 80
Nattukkottai Chettis 48, 49
Nedunalvadai 65
Nesfield 21
Neydal 25, 27
Nishada 113

O

O' Malley 88, 92
Obul Reddi, S. 152
Ottakkuttan 57

P

Padayachi 60
Padirruppattu 29
Palai 25, 26, 27
Pallans 80
Pallar 23, 31
Pallas 69, 77, 82
Pallavas 38, 40, 53, 118
Pallis 77
Panan 28
Panar 23, 34, 36
Panchagavya 94
Panchala artisans 135
Panchamas 111
Panchavimsa Brahmana 115
Panchayat 96
Panditan 64
Pandya 46
Panini 117
Paniya 112
Paradavar 25, 27, 36
Paraiahs 85
Paraiyan 28, 61, 62
Paraiyar 23, 31, 34, 36, 61, 63, 69
Paraskara Grhyasutra 11
Pariahs 74, 80, 82
Parimala 71
Pariyari 64
Patanjali 117
Pattunulkarar 58
Paulkasa 113
Pillai 60, 122
Pillai G.K. 114, 157
Ponneri 122
Porunar 36
Pratiloma 143
Pratiloma marriage 44
Pula 114
Pulaiyan 28, 61
Pulaiyar 36
Pulayan 114, 124
Pullasarman 41
Purananuru 23, 28, 33, 34, 46, 62, 63, 65, 118
Purattumaral 114
Purusha 9
Purushasukta hymn 9, 10

R

Rabindranath Tagore 145
Raja Raja I 62, 79
Rajaraja III 60
Rajarajesvara 40
Rajaram Mohan Roy 147
Rajendra I 79
Ramaswami Naicker 103
Reddi 60
Reddy, K.C. 149
Right Hand 72, 74, 78
Right Hand caste 63, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78
Right Hand faction 82
Right Hand group 64, 69
Risley 21
Robert Caldwell 58
Rowe 121

S

Saduvan 48
Saiva Nayanmar 49

Saiva Vellalar 48
Saivacharyas 41
Salem 51
Samban 62
Sambuvarayar 60
Sanar 31
Sandala 4
Sangam age 23, 30, 32, 34, 36, 61, 65, 117
Sangidian 62
Santals 8, 9
Sarat Chandra Roy 21
Satakarni I 37
Satapatha Brahmana 11
Satavahanas 37
Scheduled castes 111, 112
Scheduled tribes 111, 112
Sekkilar 48
Self Respect Movement 127
Senart 21
Senguntar 57
Shanar 59, 128, 142
Shandror 58
Shaunaka 16
Sholega 112
Shvapakas 16
Silappadikaram 36
Sivabrahmanas 41
Sivan 41
Smith, V.A. 31
Soliya 62
Sridhara 41
Srinivas, M.N. 149
Srinivasa Iyengar, M. 31, 78
Sudras 2, 9, 12, 17, 13, 14, 15, 27, 33, 35, 36, 42, 115, 145
Sundaram 50
Svapachas 117
Swami Ramakrishna 147

T

Tachchan 66
Tachchar 36
Taittariya Brahmana 115
Tallayari 62
Tattalikotti 39
Tattalikottuvar 39
Tattan 66
Tavasikal 41
Terpakar 36
Theosodian Code 4
Tindari 114
Tirumurugarruppadi 29
Tiyan 124
Tiyars 59
Toda 112
Tolkappiyam 24, 29, 33, 34
Tolkappiyar 24, 25, 34, 37
Tondaimandalam 45, 47, 122
Totem 8
Totemic groups 8
Totemism 8, 22
Totti 62
Tudiar 23
Tudiyan 28
Tudiyar 34, 36
Tuluva 122
Tunaiyar 36

U

Ulavar 36
Ulutunbar 46
Uluvittunbar 46
Umanar 36
Unapproachables 111
Untouchables 111, 115
Upanishad 14

Uppiliyans 94
Urali 94
Uvaccan 40

V

Vadama 29
Vadugar 36
Vaisiyar 24, 33
Vaisyas 2, 9, 12, 13, 24, 25, 27, 35, 36, 44, 50
Vakayaras 47
Valaiyans 93
Valangai 69, 76, 77, 80, 82, 84
Valangai Jati Varalaru 72
Valangai Palam Padaigal 79
Valangmattu 62
Valayar 31
Valperra Kaikkolar 57
Vanigar 36
Vannar 36
Vanniyar 31, 55, 149
Varna 2, 9, 33
Varna system 126
Varnashrama 13, 37
Varnashrama Dharma 26, 37
Vasishta 16, 44
Vatsa 11
Vayil-kelpar 41
Veda Velvi 28
Vedan 80
Vedar 36
Velaikkarar 80
Velanmandar 34
Velapparpar 30
Vellalan 26
Vellalar 24, 27, 74
Vellalas 30, 34, 35, 45, 46, 74, 76, 88, 149
Vendar 24
Vettiyan 62
Vettuvar 23, 28
Vijayanagar 46
Vilivayakura II 37
Villavar 31
Villiyar 23
Vishnu 9
Vishnu Purana 9
Vishnu Smriti 16
Visvakarma Brahmins 135
Visvakarmas 65

W

Wassaf 52
Winternitz 11

Y

Yadavas 132
Yajnavalkya 16

A casteless society and human brotherhood is my ideal.

K K Pillay

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN TAMIL NADU

Contents

- Introduction
- Origin and Development of the Caste System in India
- Rise and Growth of the Caste System in Tamil Nadu
- The Right Hand and Left Hand Castes
- Caste Government
- Modern Tendencies
- The Depressed Classes
- Merits and Drawbacks of the Caste System
- The Future of the Caste System

ISBN 81-8094-040-3

9788180940408

Rs. 200

MJP Publishers
47, Nallathambi Street
Triplicane, Chennai - 600 005
044-28441043, 28442381, 28443347
mjptnbh@rediffmail.com